

Not always sunshine - 150 years of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Japan¹

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Swiss-Japanese diplomatic relations, which began in 1864, are all too often depicted as a fairy-tale like endeavour and a kind of never-ending party characterized by mutual respect and friendliness, devoid of any real problems and always mutually beneficial. The Japanese themselves love to emphasize how peace loving they are as a people and as a nation – something like the 'Switzerland of Asia'. However, recent history sometimes looked very different, also with regard to Switzerland and her citizens, and any comparison is rather disingenuous. Such a superficial comparison is driven by historical ignorance denying any continuity and looking instead for some coincidence, which can be used as a convenient point of reference for the desired self-perception and the perception of others. This anniversary provides a good occasion to set certain things right – even at the expense of some highly cherished clichés. The essay seeks to remind the reader of some hard historical facts and to give a more sober picture of the relations between the two countries.

I) First Encounter and Mutual Discovery

We can assume that it must have been an 'encounter of the 3rd kind' which, in 1864, led to the conclusion of the first diplomatic treaty between Switzerland and the Japan of the shoguns. It was barely 16 years earlier that Switzerland had emerged as a federal state with the promulgation of the first Swiss constitution in 1848 after a brief civil war the year before.

There could hardly be a greater abyss separating the two nations. Here a small open-minded republic dominated by a liberal bourgeoisie in the heart of Europe, and on the other side an isolated self-absorbed archipelago, frozen in a feudal social structure, at the far end of the Eurasian continent. However, the first encounters between Swiss and Japanese went back much earlier.

Beginning in the 15th century when Swiss pikemen annihilated the powerful cavalry of Charles of Burgundy ('Charles the Brave') putting an end to his dream of empire, the main export of the Swiss Cantons consisted of young men willing to risk their lives for the crowned heads of Europe and their money who competed to hire them. For nearly three centuries the Swiss pikemen ruled the battlefields of Europe, and those of northern Italy in particular, calling themselves *Reisläufer* (literally: voyagers). Although the Swiss Cantons strictly forbade employing their soldiers on ships (or against each other), the first Swiss who reached Japan did so apparently in the 17th century on a ship of the *Dutch East India Company* (VOC). He hailed from the region of *Lausanne*, in the French speaking part of Switzerland. According to his own account, he visited *Nagasaki* in 1632 as an officer in the service of the Dutch VOC who held the trade monopoly from and to Japan. His name was Elie RIPON and he was a soldier (see: Dallais 2004 and *OAG Notizen* 12/2008, pp. 27-38).

The next Swiss to arrive in Japan can be traced more accurately. He was also in the service of a foreign power and arrived in 1804 in Nagasaki, the VOC base in Japan. His name was Johann Kaspar HORNER (1773-1834), an astronomer and scientist from Zurich. Horner was a member of the first Russian naval expedition around the world under the command of Captain Johann Adam v. KRUSENSTERN (1770-1846) from Estonia. The Russian expedition included a handful of German

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Figure 1: Johann Kaspar Horner (1773-1834). Courtesy Ethnographic Museum, The University of Zurich.

members as well; amongst them was Georg Heinrich v. LANGSDORFF (1774-1852) who recorded the exact date when he went ashore with his friend Horner (Mottini 2009, pp.30-32).

After Horner, it took more than fifty years until the next 'Swiss' appeared in Japan, causing some bewilderment among the officials of the Shogunate responsible for dealing with foreigners. He was a writer named Rudolf LINDAU (1829-1910) and he came from Gardelegen in Prussia! Lindau was in Japan on behalf of the two leading business associations in Switzerland who hoped to force the Swiss government's hand by creating facts. The Federal government was reluctant to support this mission.² As a consequence the German arrived in 1859 in Yokohama on a merchant ship lacking the necessary diplomatic credentials – only five years after US commodore Matthew Calbraith PERRY (1794-1858) prized open the Japanese oyster which had remained almost inaccessible for more than 200 years.

Lindau pretended to act on behalf of a small European country asking for the commencement of negotiations of a treaty of commerce. Not only were the officials of the Shogunate puzzled by his lack of diplomatic status, but also the country from which he claimed to be sent to Japan was anything but small. In their first report they referred to it as the 'Confederate Republic of Swedenland'! (Morita 1988).

However, even after resolving this misunderstanding one could say that Lindau's mission was probably doomed from the beginning even without the formal deficiencies. In the wake of the unequal treaties already concluded with the USA and several European powers, Japan experienced severe domestic tensions between the ruling Shogunate and its allies on one side and the enemies of any political or economic concessions to foreign countries on the other side. Despite the hopelessness of his endeavour, Lindau obtained at least a written guarantee promising to enter into negotiations with Switzerland as soon as the time for the conclusion of new treaties would be ripe. The next Swiss mission to Japan was officially invited by the Japanese side and authorized by the Federal government; in 1862 it sailed into the harbour of Yokohama aboard a gunship courtesy of the Dutch navy flying the Swiss flag!³ This mission was headed by Aimé HUMBERT-DROZ (1819-1900) from Neuchatel Canton, assisted by Kaspar BRENNWALD acting as secretary of the Swiss mission. In order to lend some mass to the Swiss mission four private businessmen accompanied them as 'attachés' but travelling at their own expense. However, the Swiss expedition arrived in Japan at the worst possible time because by then the country was on the brink of civil war-like chaos.

²Maybe this also had something to do with the so called 'Neuchatel Deal' of 1857 which nearly led to war between Switzerland and William IV, the King of Prussia. The bone of contention was the strange legal position of the territory of *Neuchatel*, a Swiss Canton as well as a Prussian Duchy, which led to violent political clashes between radical Swiss democrats and royalists with the latter being imprisoned after an aborted coup. Through French mediation, Prussia eventually renounced her rights and the Swiss agreed to free the royalists.

³The Dutch government was very helpful to the Swiss undertaking, probably because Switzerland's textile industry was an important customer for natural indigo dye from the Dutch East Indies (R.M.).

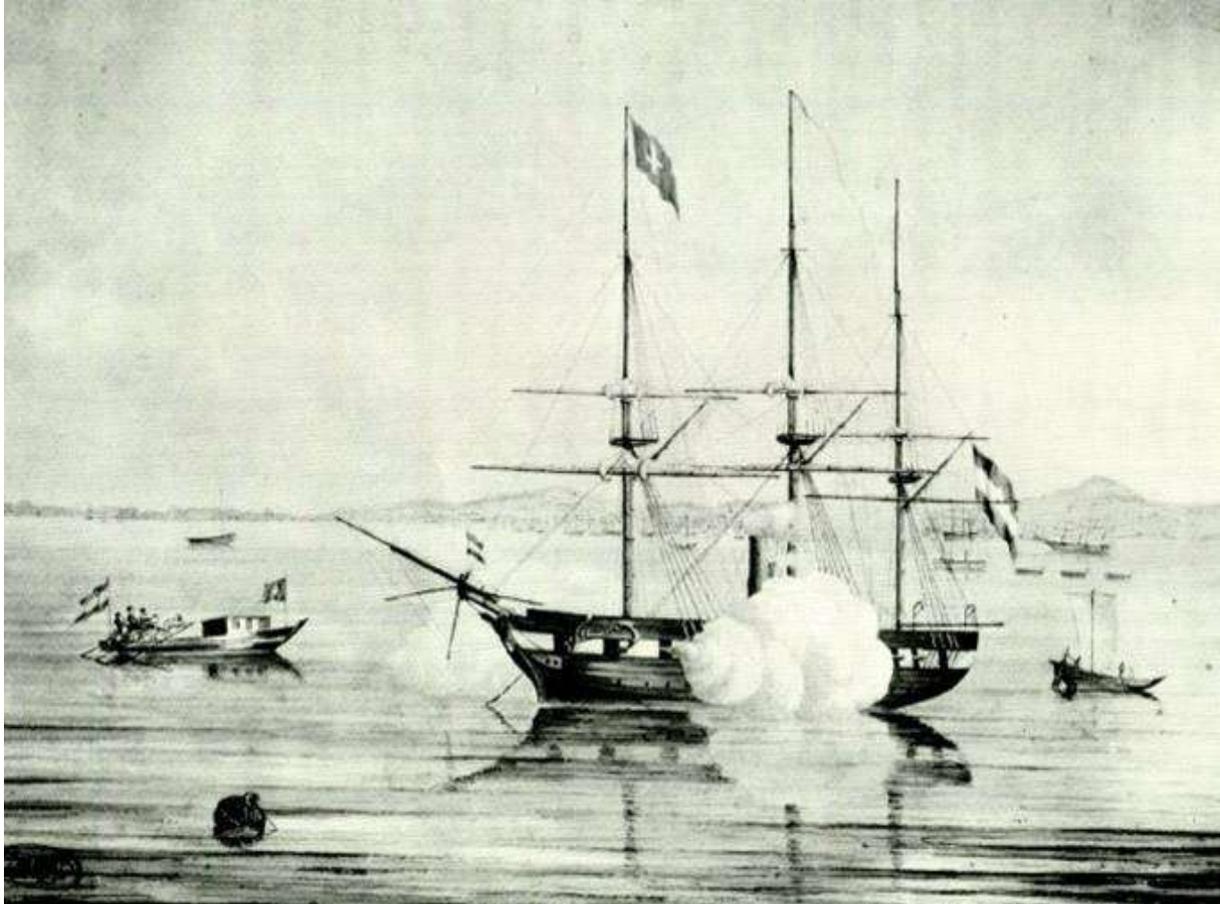


Figure 2: The Swiss mission leaving the Dutch gunboat in Yokohama 1863 (drawing by sublieutenant J.J. de Hart, Navy Museum Amsterdam).

Under the existing unequal treaties, Japan was flooded with cheap imported goods (the treaties allowed only for a flat tax on imports of 5% - without reciprocity). Japan's economy, still based on manual production, faced collapse as industrially produced cheap foreign imports were displacing domestic goods. To make matters worse, an increasing foreign demand for Japanese products, mainly silk, rice and tea, sent their prices skyrocketing. The Shogunate had its back against the wall, successfully and violently challenged by a coalition of *daimyos* (feudal lords) from the periphery who claimed to act in the name of the hitherto politically marginalised Emperor (*Tennô*) in *Kyoto*. The Swiss position was hopeless, stranded in *Edo* (today's Tokyo). The Shogunate made it clear that it could not even guarantee their safety; violent attacks by unaffiliated warriors (*rônin*) on foreigners and Japanese supposed to be their friends were quite common - even in the Shogun's own capital! There was nothing Humbert-Droz und Brennwald could do about it; the Japanese side kept stonewalling and the Swiss had to wait and hope for a miracle. To make the best of their time the two set out to explore their surroundings. Brennwald started to gather intelligence about Japan's silk production which later would be published in the Swiss Government Bulletin (*Bundesblatt* in German). Humbert-Droz studied the population of late Edo society extensively not yet knowing that he was witnessing a world that was to vanish within a few years. Once back home his findings were to be published in Paris in two lavishly illustrated books (*Le Japon Illustré*) which depicted everyday life in late feudal *Edo* – just before its demise. The four 'attachés' meanwhile had already set out on their own to establish business contacts.

Back in Switzerland, the government grew increasingly impatient with the long absence of its envoys who had already become the laughing stock of the carnival in Central Switzerland. In 1863 the Federal Council (the government) ordered its envoys to return to Switzerland by the end of the year. Desperate for time Humbert-Droz promised to return by the end of the *Japanese* year, which meant February 1864, according to the lunar calendar then in use in Japan.

At last, the hoped-for miracle did happen. The Dutch Consul General in Yokohama, Dirk de Graeff van POLSBROEK (1833-1916), leaned on the Japanese side to start negotiations with the Swiss and finally the Shogunate moved. After a series of frantic negotiations things progressed quickly as both sides agreed to take the Japanese-Prussian treaty concluded in 1861 as a blueprint.

On February 6th, 1864 – just one day before Humbert's planned departure – the first treaty between Switzerland and Japan was signed. With this treaty, Switzerland became the first non-maritime nation to establish diplomatic relations with Japan. The Federal government was very pleased with the result as Switzerland could also profit from the most-favoured nation clause forced upon Japan by the United States and the European powers. In particular, this regarded the low unilateral flat tax on imports and the extraterritoriality of foreign settlements in Japan, meaning that Swiss nationals were also not subject to Japanese law.

The Shogunate survived the treaty with Switzerland for barely four years before it collapsed after a series of military defeats against its political rivals. The last of the Tokugawa Shoguns, Yoshinobu, renounced his title in 1868 and a new generation of mostly young and lower-ranking *samurai* (warriors) from the rebellious *daimyos* as well as representatives from the imperial court in Kyoto took the reins of government into their own hands. Their vision for Japan was expressed in an ancient Chinese slogan: *fukoku – kyôhei* (rich country, strong forces). The new era formally re-established imperial rule and was called *Meiji* (enlightened rule) lasting from 1868 until 1912. During this period Japan was transformed dramatically – even traumatically – from an agrarian feudal society into a modern nation state with the resources and ambition to become a great power.

In 1871, a large delegation of high-ranking members of the Meiji government led by count Tomomi IWAKURA (1825-1883) began a spectacular two-year journey through the countries with which Japan had treaty relations. In summer 1873 the Japanese arrived in Switzerland, it was to be their last destination before returning home. The guests were mostly interested in learning more about military defence, the educational system, the technological base and the politico-economic structure of their host country. Astonishingly, as members of an age-old feudal elite they also included a detailed description about the workings of Switzerland's democratic system in their published report.⁴ The highlight of their Swiss visit was the maiden journey, on June 23rd, 1873, of the rack-and-pinion railway leading up to the *Rigi Kulm* high above Lucerne, as guests of honour.

That initial phase of Swiss-Japanese relations could be regarded and described as the 'romantic' phase. However, mutual interests went far beyond mere economic interests. In Japan's political debate Switzerland was to play a considerable role as a potential model for the political modernisation of the country and Meiji-Japan's accession to the international Red Cross Convention in 1886/87 marked a milestone in her diplomatic history. Not only was Japan the first non-Christian nation to be accepted into this exclusive club, she was recognised as an equal partner – anything but usual given the discriminatory nature of the international system dominated by the European colonial powers of that time (see: OAG Notizen 04/2009, pp.26-38).

But the ambitions of Japan's new elites pointed in the same direction as those of the great powers of that time. From the length and tone of its description in the Iwakura report, it was the equally young second German Empire under its 'Iron Chancellor' Otto v BISMARCK (1815-1898) which seemed to have exerted a particular fascination on the members of the Iwakura mission. In a speech outlined in their report, Bismarck gave them a lesson in 'Realpolitik' on the occasion of a state dinner by emphasizing military strength over international law. In the wake of their experience, the

⁴The political structure and processes of the Canton of Geneva served as their example (RM).

authoritarian and hierarchical structure of the 2nd German Reich came to serve as a model for the political organisation of Meiji-Japan.

The forced top-down approach of modernisation and industrialisation in Japan came at great social cost; the victims were mostly the rural population which was relentlessly taxed and squeezed for government revenues. Despite a series of desperate and violent uprisings in the countryside, the Meiji project went ahead as planned and seemed, at least superficially, to be a resounding success. The German-style authoritarian top-down structure behind a democratic veil combined with French-style centralisation of power led to impressive growth rates and technological achievements. However, the elitist Meiji project contained a fatal flaw: the assumption that the combination of 'Japanese spirit' with western-style organisation and technology would result in a peculiar Japanese way of development and modernisation was an error. The expression of that fundamental contradiction was the Meiji constitution. As the basic law, the constitution aims at establishing stable and predictable political processes in the rational spirit of European enlightenment. Although the Meiji constitution aimed at establishing a rational modern nation state, it was at the same time deeply rooted in Japan's irrational mythology giving the Emperor a god-like moral authority beyond and above the legal order. This was the fundamental contradiction at the heart of Meiji Japan's political modernisation and could not be reconciled or resolved whatsoever (see: OAG Notizen 12/2010, p. 9).

Furthermore, the prevailing 'Zeitgeist' of imperialism or spirit of empire (see: OAG Notizen 03/2010, pp.10-27) did exert a powerful influence on Japan's political elite who first employed the newly won national and military strength against a weak China under the *Qing* dynasty. After a brief war in 1894/95, China was forced to relinquish its suzerainty over Korea ceding its place to a victorious Japan. For the Korean people it marked the beginning of a long period of suffering at the hands of the Japanese military.

In the Swiss press of that time, the Japanese victory over the Qing dynasty, perceived as being corrupt and decadent, met with unabashed enthusiasm.⁵ And when Meiji Japan beat mighty Czarist Russia in the war of 1904/05 public rejoicing in Switzerland was palpable. In the eyes of the Swiss Russia was a brutal despotic country and deserved to be kicked out of Southern Manchuria (Wiedmann 1995, p.93, OAG Notizen 04/2014, pp.10-21). Due to Russian bungling, no Swiss military observer joined the Russian side in that war.

Colonel Fritz GERTSCH (1862-1938) of the Swiss Army followed the war as an observer on the Japanese side and was thrilled by the discipline and the fighting spirit of the Japanese soldier. On the other hand, he also noticed and deplored the haughty attitude displayed by 'lowly Japanese' in occupied Korea (Mottini, Tell, 2009, pp.144). Some diplomatic setbacks could only slow Japan's rise to become a dominant power in East Asia. Little wonder that the majority of the Japanese ignored the possibility of a Swiss-style democratic and peaceful way into the future (see OAG Notizen 12/2010, pp.22-39).

In 1904, immediately before Japan's war against Russia Isoo ABE (1865-1949), a social democrat politician, published a booklet with the title: *Ideal Country of the World – Switzerland (chijô no risôkoku – suisu)*. In his publication, he drew a highly idealised picture of Switzerland portraying it as an alternative to the conquest of a colonial empire. However, the gains from imperial expansion still exceeded its costs. In 1914 Japan wrested control of Chinese Tsingtau/Kiaochow from Germany, her

⁵Unfortunately, together with his fighting spirit the Japanese soldier also displayed a disturbing eagerness to slaughter unarmed Chinese. A massacre committed by Japanese troops against Chinese civilians on November 21st, 1894 in Port Arthur (today's *Lüshunkou*) got much less attention in the Swiss press of that time.

former role model, and tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to force China into accepting a series of outrageous demands that would have reduced it to the status of a Japanese colony.

The German and Austrian soldiers made prisoners in imperial Germany's Chinese possession were interned in Japan and treated with utmost respect and care, as the Swiss representative of the International Red Cross (CICR) Dr Fritz Paravicini reported back to Geneva. However, Paravicini did not yet know that this would also be the last time he could be positive about his work as a Red Cross representative in Japan (he was a Swiss who had been living and working as a surgeon in Yokohama since 1909).

After the death of the Meiji Emperor, the *Taishô* (Great Justice/Harmony) era lasting from 1912 to 1926 witnessed a temporary flourishing of democratic and liberal tendencies in Japan's domestic politics. This era, also known as the 'Taishô - Democracy' can be seen as a continuation and improvement on the 'Freedom and Civil Rights Movement' (*jiyû minken undô*) of the preceding Meiji-era. The Taishô Democracy was not a unified movement, it can be broadly defined as a phenomenon encompassing all those forces who were critical of the prevailing oligarchic and imperialist ideas. Those forces included the radical left as well as liberals and representatives of industry and finance who feared the emergence of a state-controlled economy. During that period politics was increasingly dominated by elected cabinets and the party politicians of the Lower House, and this occurred at the expense of traditional political forces such as the nobility, the military, the bureaucrats and the surviving oligarchs of the preceding Meiji era. In 1925, male suffrage was introduced leading to a nearly fourfold increase in the number of voters (12.5 million).

In the intellectual debate, Tetsutarô MIURA, the editor of the 'Far East Economic Revue' (*tôyô keizai shinpô*), gained a strong following with his vision of 'Lesser Japanism' (*shô Nihonshugi ron*).⁶ His ideas were later kept alive by his successor Tanzan ISHIBASHI (1884-1973). However, the military also made themselves heard during the *Taishô*-period clamouring for ever increasing defence spending. The divided politicians were no match for the military and the authoritarian structures laid down in the Meiji constitution favoured them in a particular way: for their actions the military always invoked the moral authority of the Emperor, an authority so unlimited and absolute it could never be questioned in any way whatsoever (see: OAG Notizen 12/2010, pp.22-39).

On September 1st, 1923 around noon, nature struck mercilessly – a gigantic earthquake destroyed the cities in the *Kantô* region, namely Tokyo and Yokohama, claiming the lives of more than 140,000 people. Amongst the victims were a great number of ethnic Koreans and Chinese – probably thousands – who were killed by the Japanese mob acting on malicious rumours and looking for scapegoats. Often Japanese police connived in the killings or simply refused to intervene – a bad omen for the future.⁷

When the frail *Taishô*-Emperor died in 1926 his son HIROHITO (1901-1989) acceded the throne, the era called *Shôwa* ('shining peace') began which was to last until 1989 but utterly failing to live up to its slogan. The 'Tennôfascism' devised by the military increasingly permeated Japan's society. Their raw ultranationalism combined with outright racism took hold of the whole nation. This system rewarded loyalty, submission and conformity up to the point of self-sacrifice and was rooted in beliefs about racial and spiritual superiority, quite similar to Nazi Germany's ideology. Furthermore, the Japanese military emphasized and interpreted the age-old ethos of the former *samurai* caste in a very

⁶Modelled after the anti-imperialist 'Little England' idea of Manchester Liberalism.

⁷On the basis of this historical experience, the author has advised diplomatic representatives to consider this human aspect in the case of a future earthquake. In his opinion, it should be made very clear in advance that hate speeches against foreigners by Japanese firebrand politicians (of which there is no shortage) would not be tolerated under such circumstances.

peculiar way as a cult of death and dying. That distorted ethos was used as the moral foundation for the Japanese field manual instructions exhorting the soldier to die rather than to surrender and to treat prisoners of war with utmost disdain. This eventually led to huge differences with the Swiss acting as representatives of an enemy state or as delegates of the International Red Cross, especially with regard to the problem of prisoners of war (see: Rings, 1966 p.106).

A new generation of angry young officers to whom the army offered the only chance to escape rural poverty radicalised the armed forces and polarised politics through their acts of random violence, as a Chinese observer of that time remarked. The Chinese Jiang BAILI (1882-1938) graduated top of his class from the Japanese military academy and was able to follow the development from within, gaining first-hand knowledge about the mood in the Imperial Japanese army. According to his analysis most of the young officers had a rural background and were shocked by the discrepancy between the rich cities and the impoverished countryside which had borne the burden of Japan's modernisation since the Meiji period. Their hatred was not only directed against the urban elites but against the privileged class of the higher officers as well. They were easy targets for nationalist firebrands whose ideology aimed at creating a new order in Asia based on a crude mixture of Japanese nationalism, imperialism and socialism (Lu 2004, p.213).

In the wake of the so-called '*Mukden* (today's Shenyang) incident' provoked by a group of officers in 1931, the Japanese Kwantung army advanced into northern Manchuria. By their insubordination and unauthorized operations middle-ranking officers in the Japanese armies in Manchuria and Korea succeeded in creating facts on the ground, thereby forcing the hand of the government back home in Tokyo. Riding on a wave of popular enthusiasm for their gung-ho attitude towards China they paralysed and divided the army high command. In 1932, this dynamic of events culminated in the creation of *Mandschukuo*, a vassal state formally headed by the last Chinese Manchu emperor Puyi (1906-1967).

The Japanese military considered this war to be a 'holy war' between races fought in the name of their God-Emperor. According to their perception, it was a defensive war aimed at the liberation of Asia from White Man's rule. By now the archaic feudal ethics of ancient Japan had penetrated the thin veil of an apparently enlightened modernity and the mechanised Middle Ages were on the march through Asia. In this primitive system nonentities thrived and their hatred was directed indiscriminately against everything non-Japanese.

II) War and Crime – The dark Side of the Sun

When war broke out in Europe, neutral Switzerland took on the diplomatic representation of forty-three warring states. (Rings 1966, pp.20/21). After the attack on Pearl Harbor she took over the diplomatic responsibilities of the United States and Great Britain in Tokyo as well. But only in spring 1945 did Switzerland also represent Japan's interests in Washington (before that they were mainly taken care of by Spain, see: DoDiS 2005 and 2340/1).

Camille GORGÉ (1893-1978), Switzerland's ambassador to Japan from 1940-1945 was very familiar with the country as he had already worked as a legal expert for Japan's foreign ministry from 1924-26/27. However, the main obstacle lay in the fact that Japan had not signed the Geneva Convention of 1929 concerning the protection of prisoners of war. On any occasion concerning that topic the Swiss diplomats and the representatives of the Red Cross were reminded of this fact by their Japanese interlocutors. The Swiss then countered with the argument that the Japanese foreign

ministry had informed the CICR in 1942 to apply the convention 'mutatis mutandis' ie with the necessary adaptations/changes. However, the two positions were too far apart and ambassador Gorgé had to report back to Berne that even after two years there were no signs that the Japanese side felt any obligation towards the Convention whatsoever (Jahresbericht/yearly report of 1943, p.91, Junod 1947, p.269).

On the Swiss side, the activities of the diplomats attending to the interests of enemy states and those of the representatives of the International Red Cross Organisation (CICR) did overlap. Therefore, in



1942 clear rules of communication were agreed upon in order to avoid conflicts of interest and responsibilities between the two groups (DoDiS 2340/1, p.19).

Figure 3: Dr Fritz Paravicini (front row, centre) with members of the Japanese Red Cross Society in Taiwan 1943 (Photothèque du CICR/ICRC, Geneva).

But the concept of a neutral representative of an enemy state was alien to the Japanese military and even in the foreign ministry we were not always understood, as Gorgé noticed with dismay (Rings 1966, p.104). Apparently, it did not help that the most powerful amongst the military, general Hideki TÔJÔ (1884-1948), Prime Minister for most of the crucial time between 1941 and 1944, had once been stationed at the Japanese embassy in the Swiss capital Berne. Analysing his speeches ambassador Gorgé thought of him as being an ardent admirer of Germany (*...apparu comme un chaud admirateur de l'Allemagne*, telegram from Oct 20th, 1941).

However, the difficulties had already begun to appear much earlier. In the ideologically charged atmosphere a climate of total mistrust and xenophobia had taken over Japanese society, every foreigner in Japan was by now suspected of being a spy with the exception only of the German and Italian nationals. Foreigners in Japan were constantly observed and harassed by the notorious military police (*kempeitai*) or the 'thought police' (called *tokkô* – special higher police). In a confidential report, Gorgé cited a fellow Swiss living in Tokyo with the words: I do fear the Japanese more than the American bombs (report from June 30th, 1943, p.30). The consequences of that mistrust were often shocking and Swiss citizens became the targets of Japanese wrath, resulting in arbitrary arrest, torture – even death (Rings 1968, p.27). Methods of intimidation included police surveillance, intrusion and house arrest (even of diplomatic personnel in embassies), liquidation of private households as well as arrest and internment.

In early summer of 1942, Gorgé sent Robert BOSSERT, a member of his diplomatic staff to Taipei on an official mission to close and seal the US consulate there. On June 4th, Mr. Bossert boarded a ship which was to take him back to Japan but he never arrived there (Jahresbericht/yearly report of 1942, pp.39; Rechenschaftsbericht, DoDiS 2340/1, p.68, NZZ issue from June 1st, 1949). The US occupation authorities investigated his case after Japan had surrendered. Mr. Bossert's disappearance could

never be resolved with certainty but there were indications that Japan's secret police were involved (Stamm 2010, p. 574).

Before being appointed again in 1941 as the representative of the CICR in Japan Dr Paravicini had also a brief encounter with the 'gentlemen' of the *kempeitai* who arrested and questioned him briefly – for alleged spying of course. In his reports back to Geneva he described the atmosphere in Japan as nothing less than hysterical, every foreigner was suspected to be an enemy agent. He experienced a country which had changed completely and was different from the one he had known between 1914 and 1918 (Ohkawa 2010, pp.108). Ambassador Gorgé corroborated this view - he even suspected that xenophobia was an ethnic trait of the Japanese (Bericht/report, June 30th, 1943, p.32, 35). In the same report (p.39) he summed up the strategic dilemma in which his host country had been caught: "without a German victory there is no Japanese victory but a mathematical defeat".

Doctor Paravicini drew a list of obstacles he and his delegates were facing while trying to do their job as Red Cross delegates: refusal of information or denial of access to many of the internment camps (for POWs and civilians) in the Japanese sphere of influence, particularly in Manchuria, the Philippines and Borneo (Indonesia). Lists with the names of prisoners were hard to come by and often they turned out to be incomplete; talks with prisoners were only allowed under Japanese supervision – in contradiction of the Geneva Convention.

The Swiss embassy in Tokyo filed more than 402 diplomatic 'protests of principle' (*démarches de principe*) with the Japanese foreign ministry of which only 124 were answered. On behalf of Washington, the Swiss relayed 240 American protests concerning the treatment of prisoners of war to the Japanese side. According to Gorgé's own estimate, the number of his diplomatic notes to the Japanese government was well above one thousand! However, the effect of those efforts remained modest. In particular, the numbers of foreign prisoners provided by the Japanese authorities were apparently extremely inaccurate (telegram from Oct. 8th, 1945). Even in 1944 when, after tough negotiations, access to the internment camps was somewhat eased, progress remained patchy: of the 66 known camps in Japan itself, only 36 were accessible, as were some in China, Indochina and Thailand. By then even nine camps for civilian internees, which had hitherto been off limits, became accessible (Rechenschaftsbericht/accountability report: DoDiS 2340/1, pp. 44, 47, 55, 57, 60; Ohkawa, p.113).

Only one year after his accreditation, Gorgé complained that he and his staff were reaching breaking point despite support by the *gaimushô* (Foreign Ministry).⁸ A huge problem was the prevailing attitude in the lower echelons of the Japanese bureaucracy towards the work of the Swiss diplomats; they often simply refused to co-operate (*incroyable résistance chez autorités subalternes*), even under government decrees (Jahresbericht/yearly report 1941, pp.36-38; telegram from March 20th, 1942).

But the Swiss ambassador was not the only one being driven to exhaustion by Japanese obstinacy and procrastination. The cruel working conditions under which he had to act took their toll on Dr Paravicini as well. His health deteriorated fast. In 1943, he became bedridden and died on January 29th of the following year, at the age of seventy. Following the advice of the Swiss embassy in Tokyo, the CICR appointed a provisional successor, Wilhelm BILFINGER. He was an engineer by training and a long-term resident in Japan.

Dr Paravicini's permanent successor was also a physician: Dr Marcel JUNOD (1904-1961). Junod arrived on August 9th, 1945 in Japan after an arduous and complicated journey requested by the

⁸Japan's foreign minister in 1941/42 and 1945, *Tôgô Shigenori*, started his diplomatic career in 1916 at the embassy in Berne (RM).

Japanese government.⁹ He was accompanied by Ms Margherita STRAEHLER from the "American Central Agency of US Prisoners of War" in Geneva; born in Japan and fluent in Japanese she had an excellent understanding of the POW situation (Junod, p.244, Ohkawa pp.114-116).

The two envoys got their first taste of the arrogance displayed by the Japanese officers when they arrived in Manchuria armed with a permission to visit an internment camp there. Despite being treated to lengthy and stern lectures by the Japanese commander and his underlings, they remained unimpressed and managed even to get into contact with two high-ranking prisoners who had been missing since their surrender:

US General Jonathan M. WAINWRIGHT (1883-1953), the last defender of Corregidor in the Philippines, and Lieutenant General Arthur E. PERCIVAL (1887-1966), former supreme commander of the British forces in Malaya and Singapore (Junod, pp.268-281).

By then the 'Greater Japan' folly had definitely run its course and on April 30th, 1945, Switzerland received a formal request by the Japanese government to take care of Japan's interests in Washington (Spain, which had filled the role until then, laid down the commission). The Swiss government apparently was not very enthusiastic about this dubious honour. Irritated by years of Japanese harassment of her diplomats and residents, Switzerland agreed only under the following conditions (DoDiS 2005, Telegram Nr 175 from May 19th, 1945, summarised and translated from the original in French):

1. Immediate and palpable improvement of living conditions for Swiss nationals in Japan and in Japanese occupied territories
2. Freedom of action throughout the Far East for the Swiss diplomats exercising their mandate, in particular complete freedom of movement for ambassador Gorgé and free access to all camps holding POWs as well as civilians.

After a series of desperate but unsuccessful attempts by the Japanese government to establish contact on their own with the USA through Moscow and Stockholm in order to get better terms of surrender the last government of Greater Japan finally contacted its embassy in Berne who, on August 14th, 1945, handed over to the Swiss that fateful telegram in which Japan agreed to the terms laid out in the allied declaration of Potsdam accepting thereby defeat and surrender (Krebs, p.764).¹⁰

The next urgent task for the Swiss in Japan was the liquidation of the internment camps and the repatriation of their inmates, all this in close collaboration with the landing occupation forces.

Managing and supervising this challenge fell to the delegates of the International Red Cross Committee (CICR). They quickly discovered that the number of camps and prisoners greatly surpassed the numbers given to them by the Japanese authorities. Despite this, the task could be accomplished by September 20th, 1945. After that the focus shifted to the foreigners living in Japan amongst them

⁹The prescribed route went from Tehran to Moscow than through Siberia and Manchuria. On the day of his arrival the 2nd atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki (RM).

¹⁰ Little wonder that the Japanese attempts to circumvent the Swiss and to try to impose a communication channel of their own on the US were completely ignored in Washington. This undertaking was either a sign of sheer incompetence or of unbroken hubris in Tokyo (RM).

"[...] hundreds of Jews, mostly Germans, who were expelled from the Nazi community and often imprisoned and tortured by the Japanese" (translated from German in: Junod 1947, p.288, 313). However, before that the delegates from the CICR were confronted with yet another terrible situation. On September 8th, 1945, Dr Junod, together with a US army team of investigation, flew to Hiroshima in order to link up there with his deputy Bilfinger. The devastation and misery in the wake of the atomic bomb shocked even a man like Junod, who had seen a lot already during his career as a delegate of the CICR. (Junod, p.302-312). He persuaded the supreme commander of the occupation forces, US General Douglas MacARTHUR (1880-1964) to provide him with the necessary means of transport in order to bring at once 15 tons of medical supplies into the ravaged city.¹¹ Despite the end of the war, Switzerland's problems with Japan continued for the time being. It began with a mysterious telegram sent to Berne on April 12th, 1945 from Japan's embassy in the of Nazi Germany, Berlin.



Figure 4: Dr Matthäus Vischer, 1927 (Basler Missionsgesellschaft, Basle)

beleaguered capital

The cable referred to the fate of Swiss citizens in Japanese-occupied territories in the South Sea. It vaguely mentioned two death sentences (for espionage) and two dead among the Swiss missionaries in *Bandjermasin* on Borneo/Indonesia (Braches, 2001, pp.2). After Japan's surrender the CICR tried to re-establish contact to its delegates scattered throughout the vast territories conquered by Japanese forces reaching from Shanghai to Batavia (today's Djakarta). But one of their delegates did not answer the call from Geneva: Dr Matthäus (Matthew) VISCHER, a physician in charge of a hospital founded by the 'Basler Missionsgesellschaft' (today: *Basel Mission*) on Borneo/Indonesia. In 1942, he was appointed by the CICR as an official delegate.

Little by little, the gruesome details of his disappearance emerged. The fate of this young physician and his wife Elisabeth VISCHER-MILIUS caused an uproar in the Swiss press (see: *Der Bund* Nr.414, 5.9.1945, *NZZ* Nr.1502, 1946, p.5). On May 13th, 1943, Dr Vischer and his wife were arrested by Japanese soldiers and apparently tortured while in custody. On the base of dubious evidence, a kangaroo court set up by the Imperial Japanese Navy sentenced the young Swiss couple to death for spying and conspiracy. More than six months later, on December 20th, 1943 they were executed and hastily buried on the scene. On October 16th, 1945 the Swiss consul in Batavia, referring to this case, wrote to Berne that Dr Vischer and his wife must have been decapitated, because this was usually

¹¹The grateful survivors erected a memorial site for Dr Junod in Hiroshima's Peace Park (R.M).

meant by the Japanese military on Borneo when using the term "punishment" (E2001 1969/121, Bd.183, Dossier/File B51.351 Indon, pp.3).

In December 1945, Dr Junod met with the responsible prosecutor of the Japanese Navy and cross-examined him. The young man soon lost his nerves and ended up in a thicket of contradictions. In the end Dr Junod appealed to his conscience, however, the former Navy lieutenant showed no regret whatsoever – much to the chagrin of his interlocutor (Junod 1947, pp.313-317, Braches 2001, p.10). And why should he have to anyway? In his perception as a Japanese anything done in the name of his God-emperor could not be subject to a higher moral code. The apex of that perverse logic was probably the biological experiments carried out with human guinea pigs by the notorious *Unit 731* in Manchuria (with regard to this see the

Figure 5: Dr Marcel Junod (property Benoit Junod, Switzerland)



at the hands of the Japanese military in victims of torture or arbitrary Swiss nationals killed during the war in two dozen names. During the battle of Japanese soldiers slaughtered 15 Swiss p.189) amongst them women and small of death indicated on the list which was to the Federal Council (government) on 1948 give an impression of the savagery retreating Japanese soldiery (Dossier translated from German):

"[...] shot by Japanese soldiers in their home and burned with the house (one couple with baby); [...] were found in the air raid shelter of the German Club together with hundreds of corpses, apparently killed by Japanese soldiers (six persons, two children amongst them)."

More civilised groups in Tokyo were aghast by those crimes and on August 7th, 1945, the Japanese government transferred one million Swiss Francs as a token of sympathy and regret.

An expert legal opinion submitted on August 17th, 1953 to the Federal Council concluded that the Japanese acts had been "fundamentally against international law" and suggested, given the severity of the crimes, "not to be overly shy" when assessing the amount of indemnity payments to be requested from Tokyo (DoDiS 10201, p.3).

After Japan had regained its sovereignty an agreement between Switzerland and Japan signed on January 21st, 1955 settled on a lump sum of 12.25 million Swiss Francs as compensation for the loss of Swiss life and property to be partly paid off with Japanese assets seized in Switzerland at the end of the war on behalf of the allied powers (BBI nr.5, vol.1, entry from February 8th, 1955).

Probably much to the relief of the Japanese side, Switzerland did not request a formal apology for the atrocities committed in the name of their Emperor.

references). However, the Vischers were not the only Swiss citizens who suffered Southeast Asia as executions. A list of Asia contains nearly Manila in 1945 alone civilians (Rings 1966, children. The causes eventually presented November 11th in displayed by the B51.351 Phil O;

III) Everything forgiven and forgotten?

In 1945, Switzerland emerged unscathed from the devastating war in Europe and maybe precisely because of that she was not regarded favourably. In Washington, the term "neutrality" had by now

become synonymous with opportunism and appeasement, despite the fact that the United States themselves had adhered to it for many years. But it was of no importance to the new moralism now pervading US foreign policy that an isolated and encircled Swiss Nation had no choice during the war but to seek economic arrangements with the 3rd Reich in order to survive. Nevertheless Switzerland was excluded from the founding conference of the United Nations in June 1945, as was defeated Germany (Maissen 2010, p.280).¹² However, the conservative political elites in Berne did not care much about it as long as foreign trade did not suffer. Ignored by the victorious allies, Switzerland began to scale down her international political activities substantially and retreated into a cocoon of heroic self-perception losing faith as well as interest in any kind of international peace preservation activities or collective defence arrangements.

It took decades before Swiss intellectuals began to question the idealized heroic myth of Switzerland in the war. They started to revise the picture by taking into account the darker sides of Swiss wartime policies as well such as the overly harsh stance against civilian refugees and the forgetfulness of Swiss Banks regarding the accounts of their Jewish customers who had disappeared in the Holocaust.

After the war, Japan's image was as tarnished as that of Germany. However, the Japanese elites never undertook even the slightest attempt to come to terms with the recent past of their country. Instead, Hiroshima and Nagasaki served them as a convenient pretext to claim a role of victimhood for Japan as well. This policy of amnesia was certainly helped by the complete lack of interest by the authoritarian regimes who rose to power in East Asia from Beijing to Djakarta.

After the disastrous failure of the Greater Japan folly, Switzerland suddenly became again a topic in the political discussion of post-war Japan. Abe's book of 1904 (see above) saw a second edition in 1947.

Now everything was geared towards a complete break with the past and a new beginning. From now on Japan should become nothing less than the "Switzerland of Asia", neutral and unarmed to boot - well, the Japanese penchant for oversized ambitions seemed not to have suffered at all from the recent experience.

However, the Cold War was already shaping the new world order and Japan's conservative elites had apparently great difficulties getting rid of old ideas. Their first draft of Japan's new constitution, requested by the Americans, was furiously rejected by General MacArthur who ordered his staff to come up with a new draft. This task was completed under enormous time pressure and the newly elected Japanese Diet (parliament) had little choice but to accept this new constitution for Japan, which entered into force on May 3rd, 1947.

In its famous article 9, the new constitution postulated that Japan will not maintain any armed forces whatsoever and renounce military force as a means of foreign policy. Citing this article the Japanese love to portray their country as a beacon of peacefulness ignoring the recent past as something which has no connection whatsoever with modern-day Japan. This convenient attitude can be observed every year at the infamous *Yasukuni* shrine commemorating (Japanese) victims and war criminals in equal measure without distinction. Little wonder that the appearance of Japanese political bigwigs at the scene inevitably triggers cries of indignation in those countries who had suffered under Japanese military occupation. Such an attitude is perceived outside Japan as deriding the victims of Japanese ultranationalism and militarism.

In one respect, Switzerland was lucky in her relations with Japan. The autarkic structure of Japan's war economy did not raise such embarrassing questions as those which emerged with regard to Swiss

¹²In the eyes of the author, that was a big political mistake, as the Swiss people came to regard the UN with mistrust for a long time. It took two referendums and more than half a century until Switzerland joined as a full member in 2002 (RM).

economic relations with the 3rd Reich (just to mention the most prominent: the exchange of Nazi gold, including plunder and holocaust loot by the Swiss Central Bank for Swiss Francs and as payment for Swiss arms sales).

America's nearly neurotic fear of communism soon overshadowed its worries regarding Japanese rearmament. However, Japan's post-war governments were not keen on rearmament anyway and they could comfortably hide behind article 9 of their new, American-inspired constitution.

Furthermore, the Korean war of 1950-53 became a blessing for Japan's economy thanks to massive orders for arms and equipment placed by the US Armed Forces engaged in Korea.

On a strategic level, Japan's post-war economy was geared towards fast and technology-driven growth. The implementation of that strategy followed a proven and typical Japanese pattern: careful planning and systematic top-down implementation – in this endeavour little trust was placed in the fickleness of market forces. Under American defence protection, Japan was able to channel nearly all its resources into growth-enhancing consumer industries.

However, in one respect Japan's post-war economic structure strongly resembled its failed wartime predecessor: incestuous relations by huge conglomerates dominated its economic landscape. Even these days the Japanese economic bureaucracy counters foreign criticism about entry barriers to the domestic market by claiming that foreign companies' efforts to enter the Japanese market are simply lacking in sincere efforts. This kind of argument is all too often repeated by scores of uncritical Japan enthusiasts (mainly Japanologists) in a way that smacks of ideological bias (see also: OAG Notizen 01/2014, pp.19-33).

As for Switzerland's economic relations, she ran mostly a trade surplus in her trade with Japan. In the wake of Japan's post-war economic miracle, Swiss exports increased substantially year after year and Japan soon became the main trading partner of Switzerland in Asia.

In 1964 one hundred years of Swiss-Japanese relations were celebrated and four years later Japan overtook Germany (West) to become the largest economy second only to that of the USA. The oil crisis in the 1970s also seemed to vindicate Japan's strategy of autarky on the base of nuclear power – an unfortunate error, as *Fukushima* demonstrated in 2011.

Japan's economic strategy of import substitution and one-way exports promotion directed by its economic "General Staff" at MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry, today: METI) drew ever more and fiercer criticism from its trading partners. In the 1980s, "Japan-bashing" became popular in the USA, the main reproach being the allegation that Japan's currency was artificially undervalued in order to support its export drive.

The *Plaza-Accord* of 1985 forced Japan to increase its exchange rate against the currencies of her main trading partners. In the wake of this adjustment, the Yen started to fluctuate wildly and to overshoot triggering an erratic interest rate policy by the Bank of Japan and leading to a speculative overheating of Japan's economy. As a result of those "bubble years" Japan still has the image of an expensive country – even in Switzerland! The spectacular rise of Japan's economy ended in the early 1990s when the gigantic real-estate bubble burst. This was followed by years of economic stagnation and deflation (OAG Notizen 03/2014, pp.24-33).

Astonishingly, Swiss exports to Japan did not suffer in the wake of the bursting of the bubble in Japan - on the contrary, they increased to a peak of more than 7 billion Swiss Francs in 2009. In the same year, the two countries signed a "Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement" (FTEPA) – another milestone in their mutual relations. On the occasion of the celebrations however, a slip of the tongue by the then President of the Swiss Confederation highlighted the fact that power in Asia had by now

shifted. In her speech at the banquet she repeatedly referred to the above-mentioned agreement as the "*Sino-Swiss Agreement*"!¹³

In the eyes of the author, this shift constitutes a huge opportunity for Switzerland but for Japan it is a strategic challenge for which the country is woefully unprepared.

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¹³The author had the dubious pleasure of witnessing that unfortunate speech in person.

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