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Reminiscences of Japan

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Abstract: In diary format, Gerhard Knauss recollects the circumstances leading to his acceptance of a teaching position at Tohoku University right in the aftermath of World War II. The narrative recounts first-person experiences related to the cultural differences between and similarities of Germany and Japan in their coming to terms with a lost war. The relevance and impact of German cultural and intellectual life and industrial production, and the interference by the Allied powers are rendered in a manner that adds additional insight to officially recorded historical accounts.

Keywords: Jaspers, Karl; Japanese culture; German-Japanese relations; Second World War; Tohoku University; Heidelberg University; politics in academe.

Sixty-five years ago on 15 April 1953, when I departed from Heidelberg to Japan, there has not yet been anything Japanese in Germany.[1] There was nothing to view, nothing to eat, no Manga comics, no *sushi*.

But nonetheless there had been one Japanese person in Heidelberg. Without him I would not have made it to Japan. He lived in the western part of the town, at Kleinschmidt Street, near St. Bonifatius church, where he suffered tremendously from the chime of the bells. He remarked to this end: "The Japanese Buddhist temples only chime 108 times, but these here never stop tolling."

Purely by chance I met Kimura-san in the street and I approached him. I trusted my intuition to be able to differentiate a Japanese person from a Chinese and a Korean one. Still today most Europeans have difficulties doing so.

Kimura-san would be able to help me with a problem. I was in possession of an official Japanese letter with a signature and in handwriting, additionally typed on a Japanese typewriter in columns from top to bottom. This was illegible for me! It proved to be the invitation of a Japanese university, namely the invitation to come to Japan in order to teach at Tohoku University. But not only was I unable to read the text that was written on marvelous Japanese paper, but so were also all others to whom I showed the letter; all Germans, all my acquaintances dissuaded me from going to Japan: "They do all things differently there, in comparison to how things are done here. They do not have real medical doctors. Ever since Hiroshima the island is poisoned. They have an Emperor as their God. What is worst, they always eat only rice." My father, who was a baker, believed all of this and did not want me to go to Japan, so he used the following detail, to comfort my mother who feared to lose her son forever:

[1] Brief excerpts of this essay were presented at the Eighth International Jaspers Conference, Beijing, August 2018. Translation by Ruth A. Burch and Helmut Wautischer. To the extent that it is feasible, the translation reproduces the idiomatic writing style of the original German.

"He does not eat rice. He is not going to leave."

Although I did indeed not eat rice, I left nevertheless. How glad I am that eventually I did savor Japanese rice in Japan. Our family doctor gave me a bag of blue disinfectant powder to take with me. Potassium permanganate. The idea was to wash vegetable and lettuce with it.

Kimura-san. He was the one whom I had met on the street in Heidelberg, he translated the text, and he was immediately impressed. I had an invitation by the University of Japan ranked third, right after Tokyo and Kyoto. He said: "These are renowned people, philosophers like yourself, and as a student of Jaspers you are welcome there."

They promised me 60,000 Yen. I did not know how much this was. Only after I had arrived in the country it became clear to me that it was a significant amount, and how highly German philosophy was regarded, even as Jaspers, under whose supervision I had earned my doctoral degree, meanwhile had left for Switzerland.

I sent my acceptance letter to Sendai. I was the first lecturer, even the first German intellectual who went to Japan after the war, and from the period prior to 1945 no Germans were there anymore. After Japan's defeat all Germans were expelled from the country. Except for one, Robert Schinzinger. He had been invited already in 1921, prior to the big earthquake, and he was by way of exception allowed to stay. Schinzinger taught at Gakushuin University, where way back also the Japanese Emperor had been sitting on the school bench. Schinzinger drafted one of the first German-Japanese dictionaries. He helped me greatly to settle in the foreign land. Besides him there was yet another German: Mr. Hecker. The Americans forgot about him, given his inconspicuous way of living in Hokkaido. He was a lecturer, but he had never appeared in public life and he lived with an adopted Japanese family.

Alas, immediately prior to and after 1945 there have been few Japanese living in Germany, and there were few Germans in Japan as wel. This was due to external economic reasons. After 1918, when Japan was among the victorious powers and Germany was defeated and due to inflation was impoverished while Japan became affluent, a great number of Japanese intellectuals came to Germany, particularly to the university towns in Southern Germany. "For one Yen we can live here for an entire week," said the Japanese who in 1924 invited Eugen Herrigel, the archer, to Japan. The Japanese Cultural Ministry, Mombusho, sent masses of young scholars to Germany. At the universities in Southern Germany they received graduation diplomas in increasingly high numbers. At the peak of this cultural unfolding, American-Japanese political relations hardened. The Jewish-German philosopher Karl Löwith who taught in Sendai, whereto I wanted to go, immigrated to the United States. Mr. Singer moved into the house for German lecturers at Josenji-dori Avenue in Sendai. The First World War, lost by Germany, attracted the Japanese to come to Germany. The Second World War, lost by both of them, made them leave again.

But thank God, this one Japanese, Kimura-san, came to Heidelberg in 1952 and convinced me to go to Japan. He trained in Bonn for making a career as a diplomat and later used his knowledge of German in his function as ambassador in East Berlin.

Amazingly, we met again some time ago at a meeting of the German-Japanese Society in Saarbrücken. "Look there is someone, one who had been in Heidelberg a long time ago," somebody called out to me, and indeed, it was Kimura-san from Heidelberg.

Alas at that time, in 1952/53, there was only one Japanese person in Heidelberg, and I am convinced that even fewer were in Saarbrücken. But there had been two Germans that were in Japan prior to the war, and who were forced to leave the country. One was Dietrich Seckel, who subsequently established in Heidelberg the Chair of East Asian Art History, and who had taught at a college near Hiroshima until the end of the war. The other was Erwin Wickert, the later ambassador to China and the father of the journalist Ulrich Wickert who was very popular in German television. Together with the philosopher Ludwig Giesz, the father already had entertained the audiences of SWR (Southwest Broadcasting) with question and answer games. Seckel received me under a garden door of a dilapidated house in Ziegelhausen am Neckar. Small, fast, quick-witted as he was still so in his later years. He too had been expelled from Japan by the Americans. To what extent he might have been involved in the causa Sorge in his function as attaché at the German embassy in Tokyo—no one would know more about it than the sparse remarks he himself had written.[2] As I related to him that I am preparing to leave for Japan, he did not like to hear that. He would have rather wanted to go there himself, nonetheless he advised me to go.

[2] [Richard Sorge (1895-1944), a Russian intelligence officer executed in Japan on counts of espionage.]

Ultimately I had to make the decision all by myself, to venture into the unknown, or to stay, for instance, with the Americans, working as a library clerk for their GIs.

Of course there was a deeper reason for going on the journey, despite father and mother's objections. Already in 1948 Karl Jaspers kindled a spark in me. With his thoughts regarding the circle, contradiction, and tautology at the core of all human thought, and his realization that this is found in Buddhist thought as well: The function of contradiction in a Zen-Buddhist koan: "What is the sound of one hand?" Mathematics and physics I had already behind me, Buddhism was yet to come. As I was crossing the railroad bridge at Kirchheim, I had an epiphany: An old steam train passed through underneath it just at the decisive moment when I crossed the bridge, and a circling cloud of smoke rose up from it. That was the circle, and I was in it. Jaspers did not want me to write my habilitation thesis with him. At that time I did not understand why. Some believed that I had fallen out of favor. But for Jaspers this was a matter of principle. Whoever wrote the doctoral dissertation under his supervision, could not write the habilitation thesis with him as well. For me this had a deeper meaning. If I had completed the thesis, I would not have left for Japan, but I would have stayed at home with the others.

As I set foot onto the land in Yokohama, stepped onto Japanese soil, the decision of a lifetime had been taken. Ever since then, Japan constitutes one half of my life, Germany, Europe, Heidelberg the other. Of course, the decision was not made in Yokohama, but already in Marseille, when I had left Europe and had boarded the Sumatra, a mixed cargo vessel from Sweden that brought me to East Asia within six weeks' time, as at that time flying was too cumbersome and expensive. And indeed, the decision has been made even earlier when I took the train from Heidelberg to Geneva, in order to get to Marseille. At the time this was not possible in a single-day trip. One had to stay overnight in Geneva. Only the following morning did the train leave for Marseille, the Mediterranean. Thus I had to figure out where I might spend the night. On a park bench near Lake Geneva. Somehow I managed. It was in April, the nights were still cold. The most important thing was to not attract the attention of the orderly Swiss citizens doing their evening walk. Alas someone could have reported me to the police. It is true that I did have a train ticket for Marseille, and the boat journey to Japan was paid for by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, once it had been understood that Jaspers endorsed my invitation. But the decision of my lifetime could have been stopped then and there by overly stern Calvinists that through such means might have tried to prevent my encounter with Buddhism.

And of course the decision had been made even earlier. When I had flirted with the idea to go to a country about which I knew nothing or nearly nothing. I spoke only two or three words of Japanese. My geographical knowledge came from my schooldays and the military service in the lost war that had just ended.

If one talks of Japan today, one must not forget how little was known about Japan at that time. I had never seen anything that comes from Japan, let alone having been face to face with a Japanese person. At a military base I got to read a worn book by Rolf Italiaander, with the title *Banzai*; it was published by the Wehrmacht.[3] Therein one could read about heroic tales by the forty-seven Samurai. Mind you, the book was dedicated to Erwin von Bälz.[4] At a time such as ours, where on the push of a button knowledge is ready at hand, and faced with a generation that lives through images and drowns in information, one cannot imagine what it is like to live in a world of no images and without information. At the push of a button every theater of war in the entire world is delivered into one's living room as well as all information from each encyclopedia in all languages of the world. In contrast, one must keep in mind, that one did not hear anything in Germany, at least almost nothing concerning the joint 5-years war efforts in East Asia. Nothing was heard about the great sea battles and the conquest. The names sounded foreign. "Okinawa," "Channel of Guadai": never heard of it....The same held true for the names of Japanese politicians and military. One could not remember them. Hence, one did not take note of them, even if they were mentioned. Still today it is not unusual that "Yokohama" and "Kyoto" are pronounced incorrectly. Only after 1945, in the aftermath of Hiroshima and the surrender, information started to flow, and Japan moved closer. But these were not direct contacts to Japan, but mediated through the American occupiers, these were unfriendly, hostile, and hence not trustworthy accounts. These were the

[3] Rolf Italiaander, *Banzai!: Japanische Heldengeschichten aus alter und neuer Zeit*, Berlin, Germany: Verlag "Die Wehrmacht," 1939.

[4] [Erwin von Bälz (1849-193), German medical doctor, personal physician to the Japanese Imperial Family and co-founder of modern medicine in Japan.]

winners who roamed through the street of Heidelberg, the only German city that was not destroyed, true to the cynical motto: "This one we will spare, since we want to live there."

I did not read anything in the papers or hear in radio broadcasting about the national uprising in June 1953 that took place during my arrival in Japan. One has to picture this. There is one war and two theatres of war. And the people are worried about their fate. Victory or defeat and they know nothing of each other as the distances are too big and the media too weak. For a short time, during the Olympic Games in 1936 in Berlin, something from Japan made it to Germany. The glorious victory of the unknown marathon runner Kitei Son, and Kōhei Murakoso's brave defeat against the three Finns at the Men's 10,000 metres.[5] Once more one heard of the Japanese in 1940 when on the occasion of their 2600-years celebration Richard Strauss composed festive music and dedicated it to his Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Today one can select the best *sushi* in every small town. In 1945 one only knew that the Japanese eat rice.

The relations between Germany and Japan were not reciprocal with regard to obtaining information. Not only was it known to all Japanese that Germans eat bread, there were also German bakers in Yokohama since World War I. Former prisoners of war left behind from the siege of Tsingtaos. And whilst the German physician in Heidelberg recommended to me potassium manganate as a panacea for Japan, I noticed that Japanese physicians in Japan wrote their prescriptions and diagnoses in German language. My landlord on Karahorichô-dôri in Sendai was counting in German when doing gymnastics in the early morning.

The commonness of occurrences of German cultural artifacts in Japanese everyday life became comprehensible once one got to know that in the last year of High School German was an obligatory subject of study. Also after 1953 the intensity of relations and contacts was minimal. In Sendai, a city of a million people, at a distance from Tokyo of little less than 400 kilometers, there was not a single German apart from myself, only American missionaries and, of course, American soldiers secluded in the military camp Kawauchi. Later I found out that there was a German tailor in the camp. In the war, Mr. Erkenenz from Duisburg got sunk on a blockade-runner near the Japanese coast and afterwards he has stayed in the country as American prisoner of war. And now in view of the world-renowned Fukushima comes to mind that in the 1950s there was a small subsidiary of the German Gramophone Society in Fukushima directed by a German engineer who suffered from endless loneliness. I took pride in my loneliness. To be the only German in a perimeter of 400 kilometers! In the outback of Sendai I met Japanese people who had never seen a European, children who fled me with the call *Gaijin no kata* (Mr. Foreigner). My female hairdresser was happy to stroke my hair with her hands as it was less bristle than the one of the Japanese clients and she asked me whether her female colleagues could do the same.

What at first was an ethnographic difference turned into a difference in generations. The generations became extinct. My generation in Japan and Germany is dying. Soon there will be no person alive who has direct experience of the war and can report about it authentically, against the flood of historicized history. I still got to know members of the immediately preceding generation such as, for example, the former Austrian Kaiserjäger who introduced skiing in Japan,[6] with the aid of Japanese Federal support, using only one ski pole and telemark in the curves. He was enthusiastically received on all of the few skiing slopes that were available at the time and he had free access to all of the skiing hotels.

When I had left for Japan, there were not yet any German Japanese societies, no Goethe society, no German embassy, and no ambassador as well, but only a type of commissioner.

However, there was a Jaspers Society in Japan and in 1951 I had completed a doctoral degree with Jaspers in Basle who was at the time a famous man, and who was welcome everywhere, in contradistinction to Martin Heidegger, due to his political integrity as a *persona grata*. By virtue of his *General Psychopathology* being already widely known, he was holding a chair in psychology in Heidelberg since 1921, later on another one in philosophy, which was then taken away from him in 1935 as a consequence of a general teaching

[5] [Son's birth name was Kee-chung Sohn, a native of Korea. At that time Korea was under Japanese rule and he participated as a member of the Japanese delegation.]

[6] [The Kaiserjäger were four infantry regiments formed in 1895 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and they were disbanded in 1918 with the end of the Imperial and Royal Habsburg monarchy.]

ban. After this ban he busied himself with East-Asian philosophy. Conversely, there was already a long-standing interest in Japan for German philosophy. After World War I there was a lively exchange of ideas. Admittedly, in 1924 the Heidelberg Philosopher Eugen Herrigel took in Sendai a different path with his ideas on *The Art of Archery* than Jaspers has taken with his existential philosophy, yet the attractiveness of German philosophy was enormous, similar to the one in medicine and music. But in 1945 all Germans, including the philosophers that were at universities, were expelled from Japan by the Americans, with the two exceptions of Schinzinger in Tokyo and Hecker in Sapporo. When things got into motion again, everything had to be done with utmost caution given the presence of the occupying forces. The Japanese wanted to employ a German associate professor and Jaspers had the right reputation to be in a position to propose my name. It was the weight of the name "Jaspers" that convinced the Foreign Affairs Office to cover my expenses for the journey. This amounted to 2500 German Mark for travelling by ship, a huge sum at the time.

The people in Sendai had invited me, but my first errand led me to the Sendai Culture Minister Amano; he spoke perfect German, he was Kantian and pleased to see German philosophy once again represented in his country. He pointed out that at all times one has to proceed cautiously, as if one were in enemy territory. In Sendai lived and lectured a CIC man (precursor agency to the American CIA) who was charged with the political surveillance of Tohoku University. This was known unofficially, Mr. CIC, privately Mr. Martin, lived in the traditional house of the German lecturers on Karahorichô-dôri, where Löwith at one time had resided as well, in a half European, half Japanese manner, with *tatami* rooms upstairs and firm flooring downstairs. Thus, Mr. CIC lived there since 1945, together with a young Mr. Nise, and during winter they lived in the warm South. At some point in the future he would leave and then I would be able to move in. Until then I would have to live in a Japanese way. To find an apartment was complicated in a time when most hotels were still inaccessible to foreigners.

Friendly refutation of everything foreign prevailed in order to not end up in cultural calamities.

Housing was scarce, Sendai had been damaged heavily. Up here in the North, the Americans had not only ravaged from the air but also by shelling from the sea. At last I found a room in the house of a Japanese family that included Japanese meals. As usual there was no telephone, no heating, instead there was *kotatsu*, a kind of floor heating in a hollow space on the floor that was covered with a woolen blanket.

For me, who came from the non-destroyed city of Heidelberg, yet nevertheless from a strongly destructed surrounding, it was interesting to draw a comparison to another land caught by the same fate that had been destroyed, famished, defeated by the enemies and occupied by them, and humiliated by guilt without knowing of each other's plight. The people of Josenji-dori Avenue did not know anything about the people of Panoramastraße in Heidelberg, and I came to understand ever more of the same and simultaneously entirely different fate. There were Japanese, for instance among my colleagues at the university, who accused Germany to have betrayed Japan by way of capitulation on the 8th of May.

Physically damaged in no less severe ways, the country was barely harmed on an intellectual level. The defeat was the worst part, not the guilt. People were hungrier and sicker, politically holding on to the *tenno*, their highest good, in an absolute manner; the rivers, the Hirosegawa in front of my door were bridged again, the streetcars were running again through the ruined cities, but in them appeared figures in strangely white clothing, who, obviously, yet for me uncomprehendingly, were begging. They had small white boxes on their chests. People did not want to tell me what this was about. Finally it became clear: They were former, wounded Japanese prisoners of war. They had gotten into American captivity on one of the many Japanese islands in the Pacific.

And why did they have to beg?

The defeated Japanese army had a bad reputation. Their soldiers had fallen into dishonor as they had surrendered. It is still regarded as imperative what was written in the casemates of the Maginot Line and the bunkers of the Westwall: "One lets oneself bury under the rubble, but one does not surrender." In the war on the Pacific islands there were no possibilities for a withdrawal anyway. The few who had gotten away, had to bear the dishonor. These were the men in the streetcars dressed in white.

In the land of Buddhism social hardship reigned in all public spheres. Whoever is involved in a street accident is left without receiving help, for fear of being made liable for the medical costs. The one who intervenes first in the event of an accident ultimately has to pay the bills. There are and there were no accident insurances, there were also no health

insurances, at least not for me. In Japan I had never to pay for retirement funds, I also have never received pension payments either.

One of my students, Ozawa-san, brother of the known conductor Seiji Ozawa and distinguished Germanist later in his life, had from the war a terrible burn in the face and a diseased lung. It was recommended to him that he drink a lot of milk, in a country where there was no milk. I have never seen a cow on Honshu. In that extremely cold winter I bought him a greatcoat. His mother knitted me a tie as thanks for it. It was huge; given her belief that all foreigners are so tall.

What concerned my own food at the time in Japan, it consisted naturally of rice and fish, and not of sushi as the young gourmands in Germany might think. In the morning soup made from the head of the fish, for lunch rice and the fillet, in the evening rice with fishtail, always served with finely cut tasty vegetables. Yet what is for sure, the rise tasted differently than the one with which my father wanted to deter me from my voyage to Japan.

At first I lived with a family at Josenji-dori Avenue in an entirely Japanese manner. Eventually I asked for meat, but allegedly in the land of fish there was none. But hadn't I somewhere spot beef tongue (*bello*),[7] which I have loved so much back home? But my housekeeper went on strike. "One does not eat that!" She was reluctant to buy *bello* in the presence of other clients and to cook it in her tiny kitchen. Another problem arose around the egg (*tamago*). In her family one did not eat eggs. Yet I asked her to prepare an egg. She broke an egg into a kind of pan that was on top of glowing charcoal. I asked her to prepare several of them, one after the other, together, contemporaneously. Wouldn't she want to create a shelf for eggs? She did not. Why? When there are many eggs it becomes expensive, she claimed. Why so? The merchant says, that the one who can buy many eggs is also richer than the one who can pay only one egg, and therefore he also ought to pay more.

It never made sense to her. To me not either. And since there was no *sushi*, I ate fish in the morning, at noon, and in the evenings.

Generally speaking: After the war the Japanese were poorer and their standard of living was lower. Due to their lightweight construction design the destruction was more severe, in return the cleaning-up efforts were easier. Japan had lost a great part of its oversee territories, had to deal with continual lawsuits and demands, and experienced its economic boom later than in Germany. In civil proceedings Japan claimed the patents that were gifted to them from Berlin during the war, in part for strategic military purposes, for example patents in optics; and even though Japan is as frugal as Germany, it has even more debts than we do, since like the Germans, also the Japanese are providing in the entire surrounding world for those who are begging.

I was curious about the university. Tohoku University is ranked third in a rigorous hierarchy of renowned universities that still applies today. This order is so strict and undisputed that it would never occur to any of the Lecturers to accept an appointment that goes counter to this hierarchy. So later on, conforming with the rules, I could only move to Tokyo, Komaba, when they wanted to have me there. The buildings of the Tohoku University had not been destroyed in the war, as they were also not either, by the way, in the big Tsunami. This university was undestroyed, but in an impoverished state. It is true that in the laboratories research was done, but in the humanities the funding cuts were so severe that there was no heating during winter even though there was central heating. Students and lecturers bent over the *hibachis* and rubbed their hands, in order to be able to write on the black board. This was no longer a laughing matter, when the carbon monoxide, that does not announce itself by smell, began to suffuse the room. I had to interrupt several times the lecture as I started to feel nauseous. The Japanese students themselves did not seem to mind it.

Speaking of frugality. It is the most distinctive virtue of the Japanese. One always managed to impress with it. At the birthday celebration at the imperial court no one made as much of an impression as the German ambassador Heinrich Northe, when he arrived in his little Volkswagen bug.

My relationship with the students was friendly and respectful; admittedly their knowledge of German was very bad but their inward understanding of the German poets was wonderful. Rainer Maria Rilke and Friedrich Hölderlin I came to understand afresh. The relation to the natural sciences was no less favorable. They brought to me science essays written in German and they asked me that I polish them for publication. Especially with the department of metallurgy I enjoyed good contacts. In honor of me an ashtray was casted

[7] [*bello*: Japanese slang word for "tongue."]

in an aerodynamic design and made out of a special metal. For sixty-five years it is with me without having been used.

Despite all the closeness to young and old, the otherness was striking nonetheless. It was not just that tools, scissors, saw, needles, and so on are held and operated differently than at home, but more incisively and tracing back to different world views, the Japanese understanding of the world showed itself, for example, in the following. I had noticed that there were a lot of fires due to the houses being built out of wood and paper. At the same time I observed that the electric cables were absurdly wired along the wooden walls and that the thinly insulated cables were occasionally fastened around a nail that was driven into the wall and then led on further. No wonders that, given a voltage of 220, a short circuit occurred and the house was set on fire. The fires in my neighborhood were conspicuously frequent. The causality was clear to me: Poor insulation—easy fire catching.

My colleagues with whom I had discussed this situation were of a different opinion: It is going to burn anyway therefore it does not pay to use valuable and costly isolation materials. Why investing a lot, given that it is going burn anyway. This strange kind of illogicalness that I found all over East Asia is in my estimation responsible for many everyday accidents. It has something to do with philosophy, with the thought of cause and effect, substance and accident (*Akzidenz*), with that which can be changed and that which has always been the way it was. If at all possible one builds houses entirely without nails like in the Grand Shrine at Ise.

In the ruins of Hiroshima, the difference with regard to the different ways of construction and worldviews is recognizable until today, when considering as to how well these ruins have withstood the explosion pressure. The steel-fortified concrete ruins of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce building are still there today, the houses made from wood and paper had been pulverized.

Engaging in these considerations, one has to regard causality in a historical context. Ever since there are pictorial representations, the Japanese house, identical for Samurai and peasants, was not made for using open fireplaces. The Samurai, too, warmed his hands at the *hibachi* and cooking was done with charcoal, not over open flames, that is, if one cooked at all. The theory is indeed not entirely refuted that in ancient times the rice was minced, but not cooked, in the same vein as today still the *mochi* (rice cakes) are consumed, for which theory the old word *ryōri* (cooking), that originally only signified "to cut," delivers an argument. Consequently, the unpalatable rice mush would have been the original rice product.

The traditional Japanese house was not built for open fireplaces and electrical wiring. For someone who knows the history of the chimneysweeper in Europe, it is interesting to know his manifold function in providing safety against fire and a hiding place for a snooper who comes through the chimney on a higher mission. In such a highly cultivated country as Japan there is no chimneysweeper and there has also never been one, for the simple reason that there was no chimney, and there was no chimney because there was and is no open fireplace. And since there were no chimneys, there were no multistoried houses. For where should the smoke of the *hibachi* have gone?

Previous beholders of Japanese cities and villages and today's researchers of the history of architecture in Japan did not notice that there are no chimneys on the silhouettes of the cities. It is true that on the horizon of the prints by Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige there are flocks of birds taking off but no escaping smoke clouds are to be seen. Smoke constitutes no part of Japanese art in contrast to, for instance, the Dutch art of wintry landscapes.

All of these thoughts went through my head as I warmed my cold hands above the *hibachi*.

Noticing the avalanches of Japanese cars on today's streets of the world, one will not believe me when I say that in 1953 there have not been much more than a dozen of cars in Sendai, but there has been a punctual-to-the-minute railroad and the station masters wore white gloves. One will also be disinclined to believe me when I claim that there was not one kilometer of a paved road between Sendai and Tokyo. And heading north, toward Morioka, and west into the mountains, there was no stretch that could have been travelled by car. Of course, car and road require each other: are there cars because of roads, or are there roads because of cars? The potholes were deadly. In a public discussion that I incited in a newspaper I called them the grave of Masamune Date, the famous feudal lord (*daimyō*) of the seventeenth century. The cars were all third-rate ones from America and were partially driven without using brakes, for example, my Babyford Model Y of 1937. "If we drive slowly with the old cars, we don't apply the brakes, and if we don't brake, we don't wear them out."

Conversations never went anywhere. They were always thinking in circles: If A then B, since B thus A. Albeit the circle did not fully lead back to A. Already during the war, the Japanese would not have been able to build functioning tanks, as did the Americans and the Russians, and thus they would have lost against the Americans on the islands and near Nomonhan against the Russians. Yet today, an infinite stream of used cars goes from Wakkanai to Siberia. One cannot explain this change, physically or metaphysically, this will for dynamism. In the olden days the farmers hauled the sewage by pushcart from the city outward into the rice fields, as there has not yet been a sewer system. But there was the law that allowed burning one's trash in front of one's house. My professor colleagues advised me to purchase a more substantial umbrella to ward off splashes from the puddles. "In this way you live in harmony with nature," mused one member of the philosophy faculty. Much of Japanese behavior originated in fear. Hiroshima only happened a few years ago. One day as I travelled with ambassador Northe into the back country and we stopped his VW bug and opened the engine compartment lid, the kids were fleeing from the "nuclear car," so I explained to them the missing engine: The empty vaults of Asse and Gorleben function like empty engine compartment lids.[8]

When the Sumatra casted off from Marseille harbor, I was already one big step closer to Japan. In the morning, the view from the hatchways to the Mediterranean Sea, the Stewart serves the Early Morning Tea with a golden-yellow orange. Breakfast was tastier there than at mom's. Suez, Port Said, Russian war ships in the Suez Canal, Nikita Khrushchev at the Aswan Dam, the British in Aden, India, a truly foreign Orient, Colombo, the first Buddhists, pagodas, stupas. After all, the ship is a cargo vessel, it has to stop everywhere in order to load and unload. We are twelve passengers from all over the world. The captain is from Sweden; all passengers are affluent. In the evening they gamble over money. The most important and most difficult challenge for me: I have to avoid that it is being noticed that I do not have money. This includes giving a huge tip to the Stewart at the end of the trip. How will I be able to manage? But meanwhile all is wonderful and beautiful.

I am seasick, but less so than the others. Lord Nelson was also sick. Wealthy Spaniards on their way to the Philippines pay for my land excursions. The second officer, who sympathized with the Germans during the war, is helping me. Most comfortable I felt while being on the bridge during a hurricane.

In the former, respectively still British Singapore—the Japanese had driven away the British for a while—I encountered a moving experience: Warming of hearts at the harbor in the evening. I am observing it while sitting nearby. Boisterous British sea cadets on shore leave with full wallets and make fun of impoverished shoe shine boys who put the care kits at the cadets' feet. If only I had money! Poverty here in Asia is even more severe, it is worse than back home.

A few hours later, I am still sitting there and observe my surrounding. The young sailors return, they have to go on board. They have no more money; their wallets are empty. They are staggering. The cab drivers are waiting. They remain firm. The sea cadets have to pay, but they have no more money. Suddenly: the shoeshine boys brace themselves up for giving their coins to the taxi drivers. The drunken cadets get into the car. I was in tears. Singapore, largest British sea fortress, is invincible. The Japanese conquered it in three days. The shoeshine boys of Singapore broke my heart in one evening.

In Yokohama I will need a shoeshine boy—and to have the funds ready for giving a tip to the Stewart. Soon we enter port Hong Kong, also British, in the near future it would become Chinese.

In Kobe I am in Japan for good, not just in thought. I am even welcome there; I do not need an entry visa. In the past, in order to make sure that no foreigner would step on Japanese soil, the Japanese had built an artificial island, Dejima, so that the Dutch, with whom they needed to interact, did not really step on Japanese soil.

Most Germans used to live in Kobe; not any more. All had been expelled. I am the first German to return to Japan. But I have not fully arrived yet. On the vessel from Kobe to Yokohama I have one more overnight stay ahead of me. Among the one dozen passengers on the vessel there was an Australian with a sunburn and copper skin color. When he got to know where I come from—Germany—and where I am going to—Japan—he became interested in me. Having noticed that he was particularly interested in me, I started to stimulate his interest. He found it unusual that someone from a former enemy country, so shortly after ending the war would come to visit their former enemies. What did these former enemies intend to do together so soon?

[8] [The salt mine Asse II and the Gorleben salt dome are two controversial radioactive waste repositories in Lower Saxony, Germany.]

He sounded me out. Truthfully I told him that I was called by the Japanese in order to teach them, but teaching what? Truthfully I said: philosophy. He did not understand this. It was indeed not comprehensible for a businessman. I started to be creative and talked about Marxism. This sounded horrible to him. It was the time of the worldwide Cold War that was just about to start. The Korean War was in its final phase. It was for me the first time in this world that I met a Capitalist of this ilk who needed a justification for his dealing out there in the world and who perceived Germans as being the dangerous eternal enemies. In Australia, he wanted to report me to the police, to the embassy. All suspicions were put to rest in the tumult of my honorable welcome by the Japanese press. I had a similar experience in Singapore at the time when it was still British. There I told them that I am selling trains in Malacca.

The Allied Forces could not imagine that the Germans abroad would consent without resistance to being Americanized and that they would pass on the sympathy that was offered to them. They could not believe that these young Germans, who had just endangered their empire, would be content with the defeat. They, the British in the Empire, reckoned resistance. They expected a cultural resistance abroad. But there was no resistance. The Germans did not make use of the provenance "Made in Germany."

On the ship I read a lot, since sea travel was too strenuous for me to be able to enjoy it. It has proved to be a battle with seasickness for six weeks. Knowing that Lord Nelson was seasick for his entire life did not help much. Still until today I cannot understand why one would voluntarily board a cruise ship. At least one thing I learned: The worst of all is the rocking motion from right to left and from below to above.

Meanwhile Japanese literature was no longer a kind of nirvana for me. I read Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), and I let Prince Genji explain to me life in ancient Japan, and I was delighted about the subtlety of the female author. I read the *Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon, the lady-in-waiting at the Emperor Court, and I was moved by her true saying: "When a man sees a room rising, he cannot do anything better but entering it." This inspiration I read on the ship, much to the chagrin of the captain, who had the peculiar task to provide safe passage across the wild moving sea to the promised bride of a merchant from Hamburg in order to make sure of her unscathed arrival in Japan. As I had learned, she had brought psychoanalysis to Japan.

Of course, at the time the so-called post-war literature did not yet exist, but Ishihara Shintaro gained traction with his *Taiyo no Kisetsu*, his *Das Sonnengeschlecht* appeared to have brought something new to Japan and due to this literary achievement he was elected as the political major of Tokyo and, with his year of birth being in 1932, he remained governor of the province of Tokyo right through October 2012. Recently he provoked Beijing by attempting to purchase the contested Senkaku Islands. Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's novel *Yabu no naka* has not yet been translated and got its name *Rashōmon* and worldwide recognition only through Akira Kurosawa's movie. Yasunari Kawabata who later received a Nobel prize I had still met in person. I had contributed to the translation of Junichiro Tanizaki's novel *Kagi*.[9]

Arriving in Kobe, one is in Japan, but not yet on its soil. The journey continued to Yokohama, which is the actual harbor of Tokyo. Here, one sets foot on Japanese soil. Here, my second rootedness found a beginning. For now, Germany was behind me. But here, also a problem surfaced: Saying farewell to the crew, to the Swedish captain, and especially to the Dutch Stewart, as he expected to get a tip, a debt that had virtually accumulated for six weeks since we had left Marseille. I did not have one Sen, no single Penny in my pockets. Deep in the pockets all I had was five Dollars, solely to be used for extreme circumstances. It was custom to go ashore to take care of formalities and to return on the next day to get the luggage. I delayed all of this as much as I could. What a disgrace was ahead of me! But then a solution offered itself. The solution came through the press. When I boarded the vessel on the next day, journalists were everywhere: The daily *Asahi Shimbun* and Mr. Sakai of *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and all the other smaller ones, with cameras and posters: "Welcome to Japan!" I was the first German after the war. They surrounded me, the 25-year old person rather than the old businessman, and bombarded me with questions; crowding around me they guided me far away from the ship. The Stewart had no chance. I was on land, in the newspapers, and the newspapers were on the ship. Hail to the newspapers! Japan always has been and still is the land with the most extensive press coverage.

My future colleagues from Sendai were shy, just as it is customary in Japan of the olden days, they barely

[9] Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *Der Schlüssel*, transl. Sachiko Yatsushiro and Gerhard Knauss, Reinbek bei Hamburg, GER: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971.

dared to introduce themselves, but here they were. Japan could not have started for me any nicer.

But Japan had only started and still continues to start until today, comparable to a great love.

Yet, first things first, the journey had to continue. Taking the train from Tokyo to Sendai is an additional 350 kilometers stretch and it should last another ten hours. So it has been said and indeed, so it was. Travelling from Tokyo toward Northeast to Ueno, once more a big town was passed, and then finally the journey continued to Tohoku.

Soon afterwards it started to rain and it did not stop anymore. By looking through the windows, one could see the rain coming from below and above. The suburbs became sparser. The tiny, graceful rice fields were under water, and in the water humans, men and women, were treading barefoot, while wearing hoods on their heads. The hoods were made out of empty bags of rice, one half of it being turned inward. Thus the small, stooped figures waded in water coming up to their knees, with shoots of rice in the left hand and one shoot in the right hand respectively, always planting it in this alternate way. It was raining endlessly. My future colleague, Shibata-san, who noticed my astonishment, explains it thus: Now it is the beginning of Tsuyu, the monsoon period, during which in Japan's Northeast it never stops raining.

I became hungry. On the Swedish ship we had been spoiled by a crew that had never experienced war. Ever since the first supper on the Sumatra in Marseille, for which I had to wait three days as the ship was delayed and consequently exhausted my travel budget, we had lived like God in Sweden; will there be something good to eat at all today in Japan? The Germans who were not at all spoiled after the war painted a bleak picture regarding this: First of all, there is only rice to be had, secondly it is not sure whether the rice will be cooked at all, and it is uncertain whether there was anything to go with it other than raw, wriggly fish. I did not dare to ask if *ryōri* originally only meant "chopping." In German too, "cooking" is an ambiguous word. Hopefully the linguists would be proven wrong.

And what would there be to eat now was hence the question of the foreigner after spending some time in the rainy train to Sendai. At one point the train is going to stop at Hitachi or Iwaki or Fukushima. At the time all of these names sounded foreign and were unknown but meanwhile they are globally recognized due to their manufacturing of industrial products. The train came to a halt and the *bentō*-man approached the window. In a tasteful *bentō* box made of bamboo leaves he offered *unagi* on rice, to be eaten by using chopsticks. After only a few bites, I never dared again to doubt Japanese cuisine. Today and all around the world connoisseurs are delighted by Japanese food, but only by *sushi*, although it constitutes only the beginning of their high art of cooking. The tiny cup of green tea that came with it was enough to convince me that one did not need to have beer.

After Fukushima, which despite its frequent mentioning and description and despite the tsunamis is not close to the sea, Sendai finally is in sight, a small railroad station with two or three platforms, but with a dignified stationmaster wearing white gloves.

With my red-brownish pressed suitcase that held all my belongings and that already my father had used when travelling from Heilbronn to Zurich, I shuffled behind Shibata-san toward the exit. Later I understood why the Japanese shuffle also in the same way when wearing European shoes, it is because they normally clatter with wooden sandals (*geta*). Shibata-san was wearing leather shoes given the special occasion. At the exit there was a driver wearing white gloves, in front of him, most apparently, the president of Tohoku University with a giant Chevrolet and two ladies next to him.

What do these ladies want here?

One of them introduced herself: "Rickert." My astonishment increased when I learned that both of them were relatives of the philosopher Heinrich Rickert from Heidelberg, wherefrom I was just coming. Fate had put them into the American Camp Kawauchi in Sendai. Well, even here there are traces of Heidelberg philosophy. One greeted and welcomed one another. I started to bow in a Japanese way, something I still do today.

Later on, president Takahashi let us have a tour of the university campus in the Chevrolet, the only car far and wide. Satomi Takahashi was in Germany in 1924, he had studied with Husserl in Freiburg and with Jaspers in Heidelberg. Whereas right from the first moment he was at ease to talk with me in German, the German scholar Shibata who was capable to interpret the song of the Nibelung could not formulate correctly one single German sentence.

Takahashi had the car stop in front of the library. On the second floor, in a completely dusty room, he pointed at a huge pile of German-looking books. "Look at them carefully." These were *ex libris* books from the collection of the jurist Emil Seckel. "We got them, 20,000

volumes altogether, bought in Berlin from that renown Roman law scholar. Bought in 1924, when 1 Yen was worth 1,000 Reichsmark and we lived there quasi for free. German jurisprudence and medicine, German music and of course German philosophy had been dominant in Japan so far, but now there is a different tune coming from America. All of this has become dusty."

"I have heard or read it somewhere that in Japan, philosophy, *Tetsugaku*, only exists since eighteenhundredsomething, not sure exactly when?" I asked.

"Young German philosopher, also in Germany there has not been always the correct philosophy," he responded.

"But in truth, it is so. In fact, *Tetsugaku* was used only since 1874. Amane Nishi, who had studied in The Netherlands, had named the new thinking this way, as the Dutch had the earliest contacts with Japan. The new thinking that he got to know in Europe was so alien to the old ways of thinking that he found it necessary to give it a new name. But this new thinking was actually not so new at all. For *tetsu* had always meant inner wisdom and *gaku* means learning. Nishi did not bring something novel, the new was brought by Nishida. Seckel, the old Seckel, the jurist, to my knowledge had never been to Japan."

The president guided me into his office. "We have something here that you do not have, because we have it." This mysterious way of speaking made me curious.

"Do you see this letter?" It was placed under thick glass; the calligraphy was European, the words in German. "Look at it carefully! Could it be Nietzsche?" Indeed, it was Nietzsche. It was a letter by Nietzsche that arrived in Japan in the inexpensive 1920s.

"No one in Germany knows about this. We will also not tell too many people about it. At least it is not included in the great edition of Nietzsche's collected works."

"Philosophy goes wherever it wants to go. In 1924 I was in Germany with Rickert and Husserl in Heidelberg and Freiburg. Now, in 1953, we have called you to come here, sent by Jaspers. More philosophers will come, and with some delay, Germanists, Indologists, and physicians will come as well.

Takahashi introduced me to the University of Sendai. Now I was here. Now my second rootedness began.

"There is no greater difference than the one between being and non-being, albeit nothing is closer to being than non-being (*mu*)," said Takahashi.

It had been a wonderful experience to discuss the topic of sameness with the so completely different Japanese. In the subsequent years I have often disagreed with the Japanese, on Karahorichô-dôri and Josenji-dori, but never did I have strife with them.

It had been a wonderful time there and as the time had come to an end and it was the time to leave, I said to Takahashi: "The path from being to non-being and from non-being to being is the longest and the shortest of all."

P.S.: As I finish this text, I already have to correct it. At the time when I was teaching in Japan, there was a Japanese working at the university clinic in Heidelberg. Like myself, Madoka Makinose too was born in 1928 and he rests in a small grave at a Heidelberg Rohrbach cemetery.