In order to achieve the revision of the Unequal Treaties, which were forced upon the Bakufu by Western powers (1858-1867), the newly constituted Meiji government not only implemented an extensive reform programme but also borrowed thousands of helping hands from abroad to realize this goal. Research on these oyatoi gaikokujin (lit.: Hired Foreigners) has hitherto mainly focused on their mediatory role within technical and scientific transfers and has evaluated the scope of their political agency as being rather marginal.

Starting from a global history approach and by focusing on expertise as a new resource in foreign policy, I challenge this narrative of the apolitical oyatoi. I examine how the British, German, and Japanese governments informally took advantage of the professional capital of the high-ranking experts in the service of the Meiji government in order to enlarge national spheres of influence in the context of informal imperialism.

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The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum for early/mid career researchers and Ph.D. candidates in the field, organized by Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but registration (weber@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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