

Hans-Joachim Bieber: *SS und Samurai: Deutsch-japanische Kulturbeziehungen 1933-1945* (Monographien, herausgegeben vom Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, 55). München: Iudicium, 2014. Pp. 1311. Geb. € 148.00.

Until recently the cultural relations between Germany and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s have received much less attention than the political alliance, although the political and military priorities of both countries were too divergent for the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 or the Tripartite Pact (including Italy) in 1940 to have much influence on the policies and military strategies of the countries' leaders. Hans-Joachim Bieber, Professor of modern history at the University of Kassel from 1994 to 2005, has presented the first comprehensive treatment of a relatively neglected subject. The length of the volume suggests that he has aimed for complete coverage of every aspect, and for the German side he may well have come close to achieving this. Perhaps it is just as well that he does not have the expertise to work with Japanese sources and had to rely on the (limited) secondary literature in German for the Japanese side: certainly it is hard to imagine that he could have treated even more material in one volume.

The book's structure is strictly chronological, with some of the 16 chapters only covering a few months. Each chapter is divided into several sections: the political and military situation, cultural relations in general, institutions involved in cultural relations, Japanese presence and self-presentation in Germany, coverage of Japan in the German press, films, books (non-fiction, fiction, translations from Japanese), German presence in Japan, including institutions such as the German cultural institutes in Tokyo and Kyoto, the German community and refugees. The chronological divisions are punctuated by political and (later) military events. The first two chapters treat the period before 1933, Chapter 3 the changes in 1933. The Agreement for Cultural Cooperation, which formally established cultural relations, is treated in Chapter 9. Chapter 16, treating the end of the Second World War, is followed by a short chapter (10 pp.) entitled "Bilanz 1945" in which Bieber summarizes developments between 1933 and 1945. This is the only part that presents something approaching a general overview. An epilogue gives a brief

¹ See the valuable collection, "The Otto Gross-Frieda Weekley Correspondence: Transcribed, Translated and Annotated" by John Turner with Cornelia Rumpf-Worthen and Ruth Jenkins, *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, 22 (1990), 137-227, and D.H. Lawrence, *Mr Noon*, ed. Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 126-130, where Gross appears as Johanna's earlier lover Eberhard. In Frieda's own fictional portrait of herself she assumes that Gross had died in the First World War; see *Frieda Lawrence, The Memoirs and Correspondence*, ed. E. W. Tedlock (London: Heinemann, 1961): "Then later she heard that he had been a doctor in the World War, and had died. How he must have suffered!" (p. 91).

² See pp. 85-88 and pp. 154-157.

description of German-Japanese relations after the war: much of it is devoted to describing the subsequent careers of some of the protagonists treated earlier.

Bieber's stated reason for choosing the chronological structure (p. 29) is that he wanted to describe activities in all areas for each point in time to demonstrate their independence: this is a legitimate reason. On the other hand, the many subdivisions break up the narrative. To follow developments in one area one could of course read just the relevant sections in each clearly-structured chapter. The chronological landmarks, however, were not equally significant in the different areas Bieber discusses: in the sections on press coverage, for example, we are often informed that not much changed during the months in question. Physical exchanges of people and goods, meanwhile, were directly affected by the course of war. Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 put a stop to transport and communications via Siberia, while with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 the two countries were almost completely cut off from each other, and expats from both countries stranded.

Practical constraints aside, the relationship between the countries was asymmetrical from the start and remained so throughout. During the period of Japan's rapid modernization in the nineteenth century, Germany had served as a model for Japan in many fields, and even after Japan had largely achieved its goal of equality with the leading Western powers, Japanese intellectuals were far more interested in Germany than vice versa. This was reflected in the numbers of Japanese travelling to Germany and German books translated into Japanese. As a result, much of the Japanese interest in German culture had little to do with increased promotion of cultural relations by the Japanese government or by German institutions in Japan. This is particularly evident in music, a field Bieber treats in felicitous detail: German compositions were performed and German musicians hired as teachers, conductors and performers independently of German intervention, and often disregarding German protests when the musicians were Jews.

Asymmetry was also evident in the way the relationship was portrayed in each country. While the German side constructed and frequently invoked cultural affinities between the Germans and the Japanese, similar rhetoric was largely absent on the Japanese side, even among Japanese active in Germany. Bieber concludes that German propaganda had only a limited effect on German views of Japan and even less (as far as he could ascertain from German sources) on Japanese attitudes.

As for the legacy, much of what was built up in these years collapsed with the Third Reich and the Japanese empire. Even after diplomatic relations were resumed in the 1950s and 1960s, cultural cooperation remained fairly low-key. Hardly any institutions were revived, while individual politicians and publicists were so compromised that they lost all credibility. Only Eugen Herrigel, Wilhelm Gundert and Karlfried Graf Dürckheim continued to publish on Japan for a wider audience. Bieber devotes considerable space to Gundert and Dürckheim, several times in the form of an excursus. Dürckheim, a Nazi propagandist turned psychologist and Zen master, was an influential intellectual figure after the war.

The connections between the academic study of Japan, Nazi ideology and cultural relations are a major theme of Bieber's book. Many Japan-experts contributed to the Nazi propaganda effort. So deeply compromised was the subject after 1945 that, argues Bieber, that its representatives at German universities tended to seek refuge in philological studies and contributed little to the understanding of contemporary Japan.

Given the work's volume, the abundance of detail and the somewhat unwieldy narrative, its value for most readers is likely to be as a reference work rather than as one to read through from beginning to end. The book nevertheless represents a major achievement and is certain to become an indispensable starting point for further, more in-depth studies on the subject.

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