

## Book Review

上田浩二、荒井訓、『戦時下日本のドイツ人たち』、東京：集英社、  
2003年、222頁、680円 (ISBN 4-08-720203-8)  
*Senjika Nihon no Doitsujin-tachi. By Ueda Kōji and Arai Satoshi.*  
*Tokyo: Shūeisha. 2003. 222 pages. 680 yen (ISBN 4-08-720203-8).*

*Reviewed by*  
Christian W. Spang

It is impossible to treat the book under review, *Senjika Nihon no Doitsujin-tachi*, by Ueda Koji and Arai Satoshi, without also looking at another book published in German in 2000, *Gelebte Zeitgeschichte—Alltag von Deutschen in Japan 1923-1947*, edited by Franziska Ehmcke and Peter Pantzer.<sup>1)</sup> This latter book, whose title roughly translates into English as *Living Contemporary History—The Everyday Lives of Germans in Japan 1923-1947*, presents transcripts of interviews (recorded between 1994 and 1997) with twenty-two Germans who lived in Japan in the early Shōwa period. Generally speaking, the stories of these old Japan hands are interesting for two reasons. Firstly, they offer outsiders' views of Japanese society at the time. Secondly, they provide insiders' views of one of the largest groups of westerners in early Shōwa Japan. At the time, there were around 3,500 Germans in Japan. The number is not much higher today.

These records are an excellent example of “oral history,” with all its pros and cons. The liveliness of these narratives is stimulating, and many of the episodes mentioned contain interesting pieces of information about the experiences of these individuals at a time when Central Europe was a three-week train ride or a five-week sea journey away from Japan. Some of the interviewees held prominent positions at the German embassy, at universities, or in the media. Others were homemakers or children, and some had been born in Japan. These interviews not only deal with everyday life, but also provide views on some political aspects of contemporary Japanese-German relations. As is typical of discussions of events long after they occurred, mistakes are made. This is a normal aspect of “oral history” and would not constitute a problem, if the editors indicated them — which Ehmcke and Pantzer did not do. Another drawback of their book is that it does not provide any in-depth background information. The brief introduction and a nine-page annotated chronology of important contemporary events in Japan and Germany (1910-1947) are helpful, but are not sufficiently detailed to put the narratives into perspective. This lack of additional information means that most would be gained from the narratives in their book by readers who already have some knowledge of German-Japanese relations and of the lives of Germans in Japan during the period discussed. Or by the ambitious reader of German who wants to enter the hermeneutic circle of this subject.

The fact that Ueda and Arai have published a book in Japanese on this topic is to be applauded. The authors were, however, no strangers to the project. They were, in

fact, involved with the German book, interviewing four of the “*Nihon no Doitsujintachi*” whose narratives appeared in the text. According to a comment in the postscript of Ueda and Arai’s book, the original plan was to produce a straightforward translation of the German text, but their publishers apparently doubted that such a book would find a sufficient readership. And this is the reason why the Japanese book differs from the German. Although the basic material is identical, it is pressed into a different format. Ueda and Arai make use of the transcripts throughout the book to explain the general situation of Germans in early Shōwa Japan. Most of the valid information found in the original interviews went into the book. The authors have translated parts of the interviews and added explanations to them. Other than this, they often paraphrase the words of the elderly German interviewees. While this helps to focus attention on the more interesting aspects of the narratives, Ueda and Arai should have found a way to clearly indicate where they have paraphrased the interviews and where they have added additional explanations.

In general, the authors cover the ten years between the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and 1947, the year in which the great majority of Germans in Japan were repatriated to Germany. At first sight there seems to be a great difference between the period covered by the German book and this one, but in fact only a small part of the original interviews covers the 1920s, and the difference in content is therefore not as significant as it initially seems.

The translation from German to Japanese is generally very well done. At one point, however, there seems to be a slight mistranslation. According to Beyer and Grimm (195, 202, 205-206), the Nazi youth-group for young girls, the “*Bund Deutscher Maedchen (BDM)*,” was referred to as the “*Deutsche Jugend Japan (DJJ)*.”<sup>ii</sup> This translates into English as “*German Youth (in) Japan*.” The Japanese translation given by Ueda and Arai, “*Nichi-Doku jūgento*” (137-138), is misleading, as the term seems to indicate that Japanese children were allowed to participate. They were not, and in fact only half-Japanese were reluctantly accepted.

The book consists of three parts. The first section introduces the individual Germans interviewed in the text. The following part deals with German society in wartime Japan, covering various aspects of everyday life. There are subchapters concerning food, clothes and housing, and other topics. The last section of roughly a hundred pages elaborates on some of the political aspects of German life in Japan at the time. The Nazi movement in Japan, the Richard Sorge spy incident, the end of the war in Europe and in Asia are some of the topics looked at in this section.

Ueda and Arai’s book has been published as a small paperback volume (*shinshoban*). This explains in part some of its editorial shortcomings. The book features a few black-and-white photographs, but is spartan in certain other ways. The table of contents indicates only the preface, parts one to three and the postscript. The twenty chapters and their roughly thirty-five subchapters are not indicated. Together with the absence of an index, this makes searching for specific information unnecessarily troublesome. Furthermore, the book (like *Gelebte Zeitgeschichte*) does not feature annotations, which is unfortunate at times. On page 21, for example, the German scholar Gerhard Krebs is quoted, but there is nothing to indicate from which of his many works the quote was taken. On page 132 an article by Annette Hack is

mentioned, but one looks in vain for any indication of the exact pages being referenced. It also seems slightly out of touch with the needs of readers to give the authors' names in kanji and romaji on the cover of the book, while not once printing the German names in their original spelling. Names like Beyer, Eversmeyer, Levedag or Wrozyna and others are impossible to transcribe into katakana and back without a high probability of error.

The wide variety of topics dealt with in the book makes it impossible to summarize its contents in any reasonable way. Ueda and Arai went through the material with a focus on those aspects they considered most interesting for their Japanese readership. This means that they have edited out references to some aspects of life in early Shōwa Japan which they thought to be too ordinary to mention. One thing that apparently has not changed since the 1930s (and therefore did not make it into the book), is the fact that Japanese children become extremely busy as soon as they enter school. Two German interviewees (Grimm and Lienert in *Gelebte Zeitgeschichte*, 201, 210) mention that their Japanese friends stopped coming out to the street to play as soon as they started to go to school. For Germans, who are used to being at home for lunch after school, this was — and still is — startling.

Among the most controversial topics of contemporary German-Japanese relations was the Richard Sorge spy case. Two of the interviewees who were embassy staff members at the time, Breuer (166) and Krapf (171-172) met the spy on a number of occasions. Their comments are similar, namely that the embassy obtained more interesting information from Sorge than he obtained from Ambassador Ott and others. Breuer (173) emphasizes that many scholars have so far neglected the fact that the USSR had a fully functioning embassy in Tokyo until 1945, which was engaged in gathering information of various kinds — even though their efforts were limited by Japanese surveillance. The book contains another interesting piece of information concerning this incident, which Ueda obtained from Eduard B. Levedag. A police officer, whom Levedag had generally found to be polite and obliging, told him in late September 1941, about three weeks before Sorge and Ozaki Hotsumi were arrested, “*Doitsujin dame. Doitsujin, minna supai*” (*Germans are bad ! They are all spies !*). This seems to indicate that the investigation against Sorge was well known within police circles well before the arrests.

It is hard to imagine a country with more cameras per person than Japan, where even today's mobile phones have built-in cameras. However, sixty-five years ago, taking pictures was forbidden almost everywhere. Rudolf Voll discusses two episodes in which taking pictures almost led to his being arrested for espionage. It was enough even as early as 1937 to be foreign and to carry a camera to get into trouble. Voll was arrested in the precinct of Yasukuni Shrine without even taking a picture. Later the top military chief of the shrine invited Voll to visit him and took the opportunity to make excuses. On board a ferry from Ōshima to Tokyo, Voll took a picture of an interestingly shaped cloud, and it took the intervention of his Dutch companion (who worked at the Dutch embassy) to get him out of the hands of the police. Ueda and Arai refer to this on pp. 29-30. The more detailed story can be found in *Gelebte Zeitgeschichte* (105-106).

Friedrich Greil, one of the interviewees, worked as an announcer at NHK. It is

interesting to read his comments on the way in which NHK news intentionally avoided any reference to the death toll from the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (198). In the German book, Greil quoted very impressive sections from essays written by his Japanese students about their experiences in Hiroshima after the bombing. Unfortunately, these have not been reproduced in the Japanese version.

One interesting thing that many of the Germans mentioned was the fact that many, or even most, of the Japanese public were unable to understand exactly what Emperor Hirohito said in his famous radio announcement on August 15, 1945. It was only after special editions of the newspapers carried parts of his speech in print that the public generally understood that the war was definitely over.

*Senjika Nihon no Doitsujintachi* presents information on many aspects of German life in early Shōwa Japan. It makes interesting reading because it offers new material combined with some useful background information. Ueda mentions in his postscript that he had to shorten his manuscript to less than 50% its original size. I would like to see the full manuscript published in a revised edition with more pictures, a detailed table of contents with all the sections indicated, an index and a bibliography. Until then, anyone seeking information on the life of foreigners in war-time Japan will find much of interest in Ueda and Arai's book and/or the complete German interview transcripts, edited by Ehmcke and Pantzer.

- i) Franziska Ehmcke and Peter Pantzer (eds.), *Gelebte Zeitgeschichte — Alltag von Deutschen in Japan 1923-1947*, (Muenchen: Iudicium, 2000) (ISBN 3- 89129- 639- 3). For more detailed comments on this book, see this author's review in OAG Notizen (ISSN 1343-408X), February 2004, pp. 27-32.
- ii) However, Hans K. Meissner, who was born in Japan in 1926, told this reviewer recently that he never heard the term "*Deutsche Jugend Japan*."