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Articles

(formerly Theory and Other Dangerous Things)

Recollections of a Jewish-German Businessman in Early Shōwa Japan

Christian W. Spang

Daitō Bunka University

This article is based on a recent edition of the remembrances of a German merchant, who spent more than fifteen years in Kobe between 1926 and 1946. Despite his German background, Heinz Altschul recorded his memories in English because the family emigrated from Japan to the USA, where he died in 1991 at the age of 88, two years after dictating his recollections into a regular tape recorder.

The above-mentioned edition features an introduction and some closing remarks in German alongside a foreword and an epilogue by Heinz Altschul's son, Dieter Robert. Supported by the German East Asiatic Society (OAG), this book was issued by Iudicium, a Munich-based publisher little known in the English-speaking world. To bring this story to a wider audience, the current article aims at promoting the following book:

Nikola Herweg, Thomas Pekar, and Christian W. Spang (Eds.). (2014). *Heinz Altschul: As I Record These Memories ... Die Erinnerungen eines deutschen Kaufmanns in Kobe (1926-29, 1934-46)*. Munich: Iudicium.

1) A brief outline of Japanese-German contacts until 1945¹

Some Germans reached Japan during the “*sakoku*” (closed country) or “*kaikin*” (maritime prohibitions) era (1639-1854), when the country was inaccessible to most foreigners.² The first known German active in Japan was Hans Wolfgang Braun, who produced some simple cannons for the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1639/40 (Weber, 2004). More famous are his two successors, Engelbert Kämpfer (1690-1692) (Bodart-Bailey, 1999; Bodart-Bailey & Massarella, 1995) and Philip Franz von Siebold (1823-30) (Plutschow, 2007; Siebold, 1975), who were also employed by the Dutch East India Company, the “*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*” (VOC). From the mid-17th to the mid-19th century, the protestant Dutch were the only Westerners allowed to trade with Japan, an exchange that took place on a small artificial island called Deshima, located in Nagasaki, far away from Edo (Tokyo), the center of Tokugawa power. After their return to Europe, Kämpfer and Siebold both published extensively about Japan and can be interpreted as founding fathers of Western Japanese studies.

Apart from these famous but unofficial German representatives in Japan, the 150th anniversary of bilateral relations was celebrated in 2011. The first Japanese-German treaty was, in fact, concluded between the Tokugawa Shogunate and a Prussian delegation in 1861, i.e., at a time when a German nation state did not yet exist. It was only after the Franco-German War of 1870/71 that the Wilhelmine Empire was established by adding the southern German Kingdoms of Bavaria and Württemberg along with the Grand Duchies of Baden and Hesse to the North German Confederation (*Norddeutscher Bund*), which in turn had been formed in 1867, following Prussia's victory in the Austro-Prussian War (1866).

After the conclusion of the Prusso-Japanese Treaty of 24 January 1861, bilateral relations developed rather slowly because the German side showed little interest beyond trading. Bismarck and other politicians mostly focused on unifying Germany and dealing with European affairs. It was thus no coincidence that it took a further two and a half decades before Germany got its first colony in 1885, but by 1900, the Wilhelmine Reich controlled the third biggest colonial empire in

Spang, C. W. (2015). Recollections of a Jewish-German businessman in early Showa Japan. <i>OTB Forum</i> , 7(1), 14-30.

¹ For a more comprehensive but still concise overview, please refer to Spang (2015).

² In fact, Japan continued to have some contacts with the outside world even before the mid-19th century. Limited diplomatic as well as trade relations existed with China, Korea, and the Netherlands.

Africa, Asia and the Pacific.³

In the 1870s and 80s, the Iwakura mission as well as Itō Hirobumi and other influential Japanese spent some time in Germany, inquiring about military and constitutional matters, leading to the hiring of German advisors and to a rather close resemblance between the Wilhelmine constitution of 16 April 1871 and the Meiji constitution of 11 February 1889 (Takii, 2007). The 1880s and early 90s are therefore often considered the “golden age” of bilateral relations. The German influence on the Japanese army and the educational system as well as on geography, law, medicine, music, and philosophy dates from this period.⁴

The subsequent decades proved to be more complicated due to Germany’s new emperor Wilhelm II and his worldwide aspirations, the so-called *Weltpolitik*. Considerations about European alliances led to Berlin’s participation in the “Triple Intervention”, in which Russia, France and Germany forced the Meiji government to give up its plan to acquire Port Arthur (now part of Dalian, China) on the Liaodong Peninsula after winning the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Following this move, which came as a shock to Japanese politicians, diplomatic relations were strained while bilateral trading continued to grow.⁵ Equally, academic exchange developed reasonably well, with many Japanese students going to Germany for advanced studies (Hartmann, 2005); most prominent among those were aspiring medical doctors. Without a good command of German it was nearly impossible to study medicine in Meiji Japan because the whole syllabus was structured along German lines, with many classes taught in German using textbooks written by German scholars.⁶

In 1914, the *Nichi-Doku Sensō* (Japanese-German War) over Germany’s Kiaochow concession, with Qingdao as its center, ended with the capitulation of the less than 5.000 defenders of this tiny European outpost on the Chinese coast, leading to their imprisonment as POWs in Japan, where they were mostly treated in accordance with the stipulations of the Hague conventions.⁷ The Versailles Treaty of 1919 stipulated that Germany relinquish its colonial empire while accepting a vastly diminished scope of military power. The country was thus too weak to be of any interest to the leaders of Taishō and early Shōwa Japan, a country that had been internationally accepted as one of the world’s great powers since winning the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05).

Despite this, contacts between military representatives of both countries continued to be rather close.⁸ The reestablishment of trade relations was more complicated because Japan’s fast economic development combined with the effects of World War I meant that many Japanese companies now competed with German ones in Asia but had the advantage of being cheaper and closer to the customer. Moreover, Japanese imports had in many places supplanted Western imports during the

³ Here, only classical overseas colonialism is taken into account. Besides Britain and France, Germany’s colonial rivals included Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and the USA.

⁴ See *Ferne Gefährten*, 2011, and 日独交流史編集委員会編, 2013, for some of the most recent scholarship on bilateral relations in German and Japanese. One largely overlooked aspect of bilateral relations are dictionaries. For a brief account of Japanese dictionaries of German military terminology, see the two forthcoming papers by the author (in press).

⁵ See the German and Japanese version of Katja Schmidtpott’s chapter on bilateral trade published in the volumes mentioned in the preceding note: 2011, pp. 72-75 (German) and 2013, pp. 46-49 (Japanese).

⁶ A closer look at Hoppner/Sekikawa, 2005, reveals the predominant role of medicine within bilateral (academic) exchanges. Amongst 52 bridge-builders (*Brückenbauer*) introduced in this book, no less than 14 (27%) had a medical background.

⁷ For information about the stipulations of the 1907 Hague Convention regarding POWs, see the Annex to the Convention: Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land – Section I: On Belligerents – Chapter II: Prisoners of War – Regulations: Art. 4 (<http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/INTRO/195>, retrieved 11 February 2014). There are plenty of works about German prisoners of war in Japan. Recently, Mahon Murphy (LSE) spoke about this topic at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ). The DIJ homepage provides a recording of his talk under the following URL: http://www.dijTokyo.org/events/prisoners_of_war_from_tsingtao_during_the_first_world_war (retrieved 9 Feb. 2014). See also the bilingual (German/Japanese) virtual exhibition about the most famous Japanese POW camp (Bandō) at the DIJ homepage: <http://bando.dijTokyo.org/?lang=de> (retrieved 9 February 2014).

⁸ Saaler, 2006, describes why the Japanese army stuck to the German model even after Germany lost World War I. Karl Haushofer and his network of contacts provided important links between academic, diplomatic and military circles in Germany and Japan during the interwar years. See Spang, 2013b, for further details. With regard to navy relations, Sander-Nagashima, 2006, provides the necessary background.

war, when Germany, Britain and France (1914-18) as well as the USA (1917/18) had been busy fighting each other.

It was mostly due to the successful activities of Dr. Wilhelm Solf, the first ambassador of the Weimar Republic in Tokyo that relations between Japan and Germany returned to a positive footing. Solf was heavily involved in the foundation of two bilateral cultural institutes in Berlin and Tokyo in 1926/27. These institutes, along with the creation of chairs of Japanese Studies in Hamburg (1914) and Leipzig (1932), were attempts to deal with the imbalance between the few Germans able to read, speak and write Japanese and the high number of Japanese who were interested in German language and culture. During his tenure as German ambassador (1920-28), Solf gained the respect of the Japanese, so that Tokyo asked the German foreign office to extend his stay in Japan because they wanted him to act as doyen (dean) of the diplomatic corps at the official inauguration of Emperor Hirohito as Shōwa Tennō in November 1928.⁹

The slow but steady increase in German interest in Japan led not only to the establishment of the already mentioned institutes in both capitals but also to the foundation of a *Kulturinstitut* in Kyoto in 1934. Furthermore, the 1930s saw the first regular German exchange students coming to Japan. Many of them later returned to Japan as diplomats, teachers or merchants.¹⁰

Due to Japan's victory over Russia in 1904/05 and the widely held image of the Japanese nation as being racially pure, Hitler and his party favored Japan over China.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933 did not have an immediate impact on bilateral relations, due to a lack of interest in Tokyo. Japan was not only concerned about Nazi racism, but – due to the Versailles stipulations – Germany was too weak to attract much attention among Japanese politicians. Only after Nazi racism was somehow sorted out by the Nuremberg race laws (1935), which identified the Jews as the only inferior race (thus transforming most others to “honorary Aryan” status)¹², the reestablishment of conscription and the build-up of German military power, did the Third Reich gain more attention in Tokyo. The fact that both countries left the League of Nations in 1933 had already created some kind of awareness on both sides.

It would be wrong, though, to assume that German-Japanese Axis relations, initiated by the conclusion of the Anticomintern Pact in November 1936, remained steadfast and solid until 1945. In fact, the pact against the Third Communist International (Comintern, established 1919) was joined by Italy (1937) and some other states but became obsolete after Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart, Vyacheslav Molotov, concluded the Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union (commonly known as the “Hitler-Stalin Pact”) in August 1939 in Moscow. Approaching the USSR in such a way was a tactical maneuver in preparation for the later surprise attack in June 1941, but as Japan was informed neither about the preceding negotiations nor about Hitler's real intentions, the new treaty was interpreted as a breach of the earlier Anticomintern Pact. The Hiranuma cabinet resigned and diplomatic relations between Berlin and Tokyo came to a temporary standstill. Instead, Japan tried to negotiate some kind of arrangement with the Western powers, an effort that did not lead anywhere because Washington and its allies demanded Japan's withdrawal from China, while Tokyo was not prepared to offer concessions on such a scale.

It was due to events in Europe that German-Japanese relations improved again: After the *Wehrmacht* occupied much of Western Europe, Japan began to consider a potential take-over of

⁹ Despite the fact that Solf played a very important role within German-Japanese relations after World War I, the only biography (Vietsch, 1961) about Solf, who had been governor of German Samoa, Colonial and Foreign Minister before coming to Tokyo, is more than 50 years old and not very informative about his time in Japan.

¹⁰ Ehmcke & Pantzer, 2000, present the remembrance of some 22 Germans, who lived in Japan during the early Shōwa era. Richard Breuer (pp. 117-133) und Franz Krapf (pp. 148-158) are two of those who returned to Japan as diplomats, the latter as West German ambassador (1966-71).

¹¹ There is no doubt that Karl Haushofer played an important role in creating Hitler's positive image of Japan. For further details see Spang, 2013b, pp. 385-393.

¹² The Nuremberg Laws were officially announced in September 1935 at the 7th Nazi party convention and were followed by supplementary decrees later that year, extending the scope of the law to gypsies and people of dark complexion.

French and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia. To safeguard such a move, the Japanese government wanted to make sure that the Third Reich would not interfere. Therefore, in early autumn 1940, Tokyo approached Berlin (and Rome), leading to the Tripartite Pact, which was aimed at the United States, because the signatories hoped that Washington would be afraid of getting involved in a war in the Atlantic and in the Pacific at the same time. In fact, the war in Europe had direct repercussions on the German community in Japan because the colonial administration of Dutch East India retaliated first by interning all Germans before women and children were allowed to leave – mostly for Shanghai and Kobe, where the majority of them stayed until 1947. Their arrival and life in the Japanese harbor town is reflected in Altschul's recollections as well (pp. 56, 88, 116).¹³

After the outbreak of hostilities between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in Europe as well as between Japan and the USA in the Pacific, Germany and Japan were fighting alongside each other but there was barely any common military strategy. Despite the fact that Hitler had declared war on the USA after the Pearl Harbor attacks, Germany's main enemy remained the USSR, at least until the opening of a second front in Normandy in 1944. Japan again was mostly occupied by its fight against China and the USA. While Germany was conquered during 1944/45, leading to the Third Reich's unconditional surrender in May 1945, it took a further three months before Hirohito announced the end of the Pacific War on August 15 – after two atomic bombs had destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This short overview shows that relations between Germany and Japan have seen many changes and have meandered between cooperation and opposition, depending on the area under scrutiny. There has never been a straight connection between Germany's influences on Meiji Japan's modernization and the attempt to challenge the post-World War I status quo in Europe and Asia, initiated by radical circles in Berlin and Tokyo.

2) The German community in Japan and the German East Asiatic Society (OAG)

After the opening of the so-called "Treaty Ports", the first German merchants came to Japan. Their number grew considerably after the conclusion of the above-mentioned Prusso-Japanese Treaty. Traders were followed by military and legal advisors along with some professors. Furthermore, there were the diplomatic representatives of Prussia first, then of the North German Federation, and finally of the newly founded Wilhelmine Empire. In the beginning, there was only a consulate in Yokohama (est. 1863). Two years later, the main representative, Max von Brandt, moved his office to Edo (Tokyo) before separate consulates were set up in Yokohama and Kobe in 1872 and 1874, respectively.¹⁴

Within a dozen years after the establishment of official relations between Prussia/Germany and Japan, two German Clubs in Yokohama (*Germania*, est. 1863) and Kobe (*Union*, later *Concordia*, est. 1868) along with the German East Asiatic Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, OAG in Tokyo, est. 1873) were founded.¹⁵ Thus, the German communities in the three centers of German life in Japan had organized themselves rather quickly. While the clubs in the port cities focused on social events, the OAG was an academic society which held regular lectures. As there have always been OAG members in Kansai as well, some OAG events have been held in Kobe at times, particularly during the interwar years, when an active OAG group existed in the city.

¹³ The male internees were transferred to British India in early 1942. One of the ships transporting them was sunk by a Japanese plane, killing the 480 Germans onboard. 50 years ago, the German journal *Der Spiegel* reported on this event in two anonymous articles published on 22 December 1965: 42-44 (<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46275481.html>) and on 6 February 1966: 42-44 (<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46265597.html>) (both retrieved 3 March 2014).

¹⁴ For an account of the lives and work Germany's top-diplomats in Japan, see Schwalbe & Seemann, 1974. Generalkonsulat der BRD Osaka-Kobe (ed.), 1974, contains much valuable information about the situation of Germans in Kansai. The consulate in Kobe was upgraded to Consulate General in 1922, the one in Yokohama was closed after the great earthquake in 1923. A separate consulate in Osaka existed briefly from 1930 to 1934.

¹⁵ For a list of publications dealing with the history of the OAG, check the following section of the OAG-homepage: <http://www.oag.jp/ueber-die-oag/goag/> (retrieved 9 February 2014). See Spang, Saaler, and Wippich (in press).

From 1873 onwards, the OAG edited its own journal, the *Mitteilungen der OAG (MOAG)*, which was one of the earliest academic journals dealing with East Asiatic topics in a Western language.¹⁶ Because some influential Japanese such as Katsura Tarō and Gotō Shinpei joined the OAG, the society developed into an important center of German-Japanese exchanges (Spang, 2013a).

Even though the OAG was meant to be an academic endeavor, there were always many businessmen among its members, with quite a few of them publishing about Japan and East Asia in the *MOAG* and the *Nachrichten der OAG (NOAG)*, the OAG newsletter.¹⁷ Due to its close relations with the three most important groups within the German community in Japan (i.e., academics, diplomats and traders), the past of the OAG reflects the history of Germans in Japan as well as the state of bilateral relations (Spang, Saaler, & Wippich, in press).

When the “golden era” of German-Japanese relations ended in 1895, it did therefore not take long before the OAG also encountered problems. Early in the 20th century, the society not only saw its membership falling but had difficulties finding enough speakers for its monthly lectures. Many things were reformed thereafter: The society acquired the status of a Japanese legal institution (*shadan hōjin*) in 1904, the traditionally close relations with the German delegation/embassy were loosened in 1907, and from 1909 onwards, OAG events were opened to women on a more regular basis. Thus, the OAG followed the zeitgeist by becoming more democratic and less gender-biased, leading to rising membership figures. During World War I, OAG activities came to a standstill, but the Japanese government did not close the society due to its *shadan hōjin* status.

After the war, many of the former German POWs stayed in Japan. A great number of them joined the OAG, which published some of the works these POWs had written while in Japanese camps. However, the rejuvenated society struggled financially, in part because it had lost some of its operating capital due to the war and German hyperinflation. It was the above-mentioned Wilhelm Solf, who was able to provide some help by transferring money that the Japanese government had confiscated from German nationals during the war to the OAG, which could thus balance out its debts and initiate the already mentioned *NOAG* in 1926 (Spang, 2006).

Nature had intervened three years before, however, and altered the course of events for many Germans in Japan. After the great Kanto earthquake had destroyed much of Tokyo and Yokohama on 1 September 1923, many German companies moved to the Kansai region, where Kobe became the home of hundreds of Germans.¹⁸ During the interwar years, the city and its harbor played an extremely important role in Japan’s international trade. According to reports by the local German Consulate General, Kobe harbor handled no less than 58% of Japan’s imports and 60% of its exports in 1935 (Brümmer, 1974, p. 33).

Among the Germans in Japan, supporters of the Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, NSDAP*) did not play any role until 1933, but after the establishment of the first official Nazi group in Japan (*Ortsgruppe Tokyo-Yokohama*) in June of that year, it took only months until many of the other Nazi organizations opened their own branches in Japan; these included the National-Socialist Teachers’ Association (*Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund, NSLB*) and the Nazi leisure organization Strength Through Joy (*Kraft-durch-Freude, KdF*). There was even a youth organization along the lines of the infamous *Hitler Jugend (HJ)*, only it was called differently here. In fact, the “Deutsche Jugend Japan” (*DJJ*, German Youth Japan) allowed some children to participate who would not have been able to join the *Hitler Jugend*, due to their family background.

Thus, a growing number of Nazi representatives and party members were able to gain control over most formerly independent German institutions in Japan. In 1935, an NSDAP group in Kansai

¹⁶ The OAG still exists today, with its headquarters in Tokyo. See the bilingual (German/Japanese) homepage www.oag.jp for further details about activities in Tokyo and Kobe. After World War II, a separate OAG was founded in Hamburg, Germany.

¹⁷ Examples of this kind of businessmen were Johannes Barth, Kurt Meissner and Heinz von der Laan, who was an acquaintance of Heinz Altschul. While Vol. 1-70 of the *NOAG* had been published by the OAG in Tokyo (with the exception of Vol. 33 [published in Shanghai]), nowadays, the *NOAG* is published by the OAG Hamburg (see Note 16).

¹⁸ The German School Kobe (est. 1909) saw a rise in student numbers after the earthquake. See Lehmann, 2009, pp. 38-39. According to Brümmer, 1974, p. 31, about 200 Germans lived in the Kobe area in 1923.

(*Ortsgruppe Osaka-Kobe*) was established along with a subgroup (*Stützpunkt*) on Kyushu. Thereafter, a Japan-wide umbrella-organization of the NSDAP (*Landesgruppe Japan*) was set up in Tokyo (Bieber, 2010; Nakamura, 2009).

Despite some resistance by people like the Buddhism-expert Bruno Petzold in Tokyo (Schauwecker, 2009) or the protestant missionary Eugen Hessel in Kyōto and Kobe (Nakamura, 2009, pp. 452-456), the Nazis' influence on the lives of most Germans living in Japan was constantly growing. In 1936, an integrated Nazi-controlled community, the so-called *Deutsche Gemeinde Tokyo-Yokohama*, was established. After that, the OAG, for example, was no longer in control of its own building, which was now run by the *Gemeinde* and called "*Deutsches Haus Tokyo*" (German House Tokyo) (Spang, 2011).

It took the Nazis slightly longer to extend their control over the German community in the Kansai area, partly because numerous Germans explicitly lived in Kobe to avoid interference either from the German embassy or from their company headquarters in Tokyo or Yokohama. Some also entertained reservations vis-à-vis the Nazi movement (Daerr, 1974, p. 16). Nevertheless, two years after streamlining the German community in the Kantō area, all Germans living in Osaka and Kobe were integrated into their own *Gemeinde*. From then on, Nazi control over German life in Japan's big cities became increasingly widespread.¹⁹ One example for this was their outspoken push for anti-Semitic policies. German institutions got rid of anyone who was not Aryan; German companies in Japan were pressured to release Jewish employees. The longer the Third Reich lasted, the more complete became the Nazification of the embassy in Tokyo and the Consulate General in Kobe. In various meetings with their local counterparts, these Nazi diplomats tried to convince Japanese officials to put pressure on local universities to stop employing Jewish scholars and musicians. Because the Japanese never fully understood or subscribed to Nazi racism, this endeavor took much longer than the Nazis would have wished.²⁰

3) Recollections of life in Kobe

Heinz Altschul was born in 1903 in Dresden, Saxony, a place which he describes in his recollections as "one of the most beautiful cities in Europe".²¹ After leaving school, he worked for a while in his father's company before going to Japan on board of the SS Trier (II), a 9415t freighter with some passenger cabins, the first of many adventures to come.²² Altschul vividly describes (p. 19) what it meant to go to East Asia on a budget, i.e., not on board one of the much more luxurious North German Lloyd liners like the famous SS Bremen (IV, 51.656t), which he boarded four years later to get from New York to Hamburg:

The next stop after Suez was Perim at the far end of the Red Sea, not too far from Aden. We stopped there for taking on coal. If there is any hell on earth it must be Perim; there is not a blade of grass, no tree, no bush, only hot, red rock and sand. Our portholes on the steamer

¹⁹ Towards the end of World War II, the German *Gemeinden* in the Kanto and Kansai areas were renamed as *Reichsdeutsche Gemeinschaft*. See Bieber, 2014, pp. 1024-1025.

²⁰ Interesting is a report that the German ambassador to Japan, Eugen Ott, sent to the German Foreign Office on 18 Oct. 1939, pp. 2-3 (See Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, R 61439). In this report, Ott mentions that Honda Kumatarō, a high official in the Japanese Foreign Office, rejected firing Jewish professors with the argument that academic ability, rather than religion, was the main hiring criterion used by Japanese universities. That the Nazi-pressure nevertheless had some effect can be seen by the following example. Karl Löwith, a protestant who was considered Jewish by the Nazis, told one of his acquaintances after the war that the president of the Imperial University in Sendai, where Löwith taught philosophy from 1936 to 1941, was asked by the Japanese Ministry of Culture to fire him. Even though Löwith's boss did not do so, Löwith left Japan in 1941 to go to the USA. See Dietrich Seckel in Ehmcke and Pantzer, 2000, p. 49. Another famous example of non-compliance with Nazi race laws were the actions of Chiune Sugihara, who, as Japanese vice-consul in Lithuania, issued about 6.000 transit visas for Jews, which enabled them to flee from the approaching German *Wehrmacht*.

²¹ This evaluation might have been true before the Allies bombed the city towards the end of World War II (on 13 and 15 February 1945). However, some of the famous old buildings like the *Zwinger*, the *Semperoper* and the *Frauenkirche* have been restored to their former appearance.

²² The *SS Trier (II)* was launched only in 1924, which does not really fit Altschul's description of her as "an old, coal-burning steamer, which was mainly a freighter." Possibly, he meant "old-fashioned".

were all closed tightly to prevent coal dust from entering the different cabins, and then the coaling began. A wretched parade of black men, women and children, loaded with baskets, was bringing up the coal over the gangplank into the bunkers, then returning empty-handed over the other gangplank, and this procedure kept on going for hours on end. I ventured out on deck for a short while and within ten minutes I was as black as the natives who were loading the coals.

After arriving in Kobe on 7 April 1926, Altschul worked for Winckler & Co., a German trading company that still exists. Altschul joined the German Club *Concordia* in Kobe, which had around 170 members in the late 1920s (Refardt, 1956, pp. 23, 29, 31-34). A devoted sailor himself, he got involved with the international community in the Kobe Regatta and Athletic Club (KR&AC).²³ He also enjoyed travelling (with his German DKW bike or by train), hiking, and especially skiing,²⁴ thus seeing a lot of his host country before he left Japan in fall 1929.

After a return trip via the Philippines, Australia, Hawaii, and America, Altschul got back to Germany in the spring of 1930 to rejoin his father's company. In April 1931, he married Emma Johanna (Hanni) Giudice in Dresden, where their only son Dieter Robert (Bob) was born in October 1933. With Hitler coming to power, Altschul's situation changed drastically. His father hailed from a Jewish family and his mother had a Jewish grandfather. Even though Heinz Altschul had been raised as a protestant and religion did not play any important role in his family, the Nazis considered them Jewish. Due to this situation, Altschul accepted an offer by Winckler & Co. to return to his former job in Kobe. He did so with the intention to go back five years later. While he went to Japan in late spring 1934 via New York, his wife and son traveled by boat and arrived in September of that year. Naturally, Altschul's new life in Kobe was different from the one he had enjoyed in the 1920s. Now, he was a married man with a little son. Besides catching up with some of his former acquaintances, he and his wife made some new friends as well.

Pictures 1 & 2

(left) Hanni and Heinz Altschul in the garden of their rented house in Kobe; late 1936.

(right) Heinz and Bob around the same time.



²³ The KR&AC still exists today. See the history section of the club's homepage for an account of its past: <http://www.krac.org/history.html> (retrieved 10 February 2014). In Kobe, the biggest groups of foreigners were the British, the Germans and the Dutch. See Harold S. Williams, 1974, p. 20 and p. 23. Altschul's recollections show that there were also various Swiss businessmen living in Kansai in the 1930s and 40s.

²⁴ In Dresden, Altschul had been a member of the local Rowing Club (Dresdner Ruderverein) and its ski department. In the OAG archive in Tokyo, some correspondence between the club and Altschul is available. On 25 May 1934 they told him that they were happy to list him as an external member, but on 30 March 1936 Heinz Altschul's brother Rudolf reported that the club was about to delete both of them from the membership lists because they were considered Jewish. See Herweg, in Herweg, Pekar, and Spang, 2014, pp. 130-131.

Things went smoothly in Kobe until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. According to Altschul's recollections, the war on the continent took its toll on people's everyday life quicker than one would expect (p. 43):

The war in China made itself felt by certain shortages of items in Japan itself. For example, I recall that gasoline was limited and distributed by quotas as early as 1938. I remember a beautiful three-day trip in my car [a 1934 Ford Model 40B roadster] with a good friend of mine, Dr. [Henry] Wohlrab, through the Yamato Peninsula carrying our own gasoline [...] in the trunk of the car and between our legs in the front, just to be sure we would not run out of gasoline; and we did not. Trucks and buses in Japan were gradually converted from gasoline-burning to wood-gas and charcoal-gas burning, and many of the Kobe buses, trucks and taxis were gradually equipped with wood-burning stoves. The lack of power of these converted vehicles made driving difficult in the hilly streets of Kobe, and going uphill was quite often very slow.

Until 1938, Heinz Altschul was able to work and live without much interference by the local Nazis. Yet, when their number and influence grew, many of his colleagues, acquaintances and even his friends tried to avoid him (in public at least), a behavior for which Altschul later showed a surprising amount of understanding, when saying (p. 65): “[...] relationships had to calm down considerably. [...] I could not blame anyone, because we just were outcasts at that time, and they [...] could not risk any trouble.” It has to be mentioned here again that Altschul had been raised as a protestant and that he and his family did not consider themselves Jewish before Hitler came to power. The following description of Altschul's situation in Kobe shows how Nazi views influenced his life in Japan from the late 1930s onwards (p. 40):

Friends, with whom we had good relationships for years and years, all of a sudden did not know us anymore, or went to the other side of the street when they saw us coming, in fear that if they talked to us, one of the Nazis [...] would immediately retaliate against them; they were just plain scared.

In his recollections, Altschul mentions one particularly striking case where “a super Nazi”, a Mrs. Möbus,²⁵ complained about an acquaintance of the Altschuls, who moved into their house for some time in 1939 (p. 41) while Heinz, Hanni and Bob were on a trip to the United States (pp. 65-66):

To show how difficult and troublesome it could be for other people if they had any contact with us, I remember a situation with a Miss Paula Jantzen, who used to be a secretary at Winckler & Co. when I was there beginning in 1926 [...]. She [later] found a job at the German consulate in Kobe. Sometime after that, my family and I went on vacation, and she indicated that she would like to live in our house while we were away. I thought this was a good idea: our servant was there, the house would be lived in, and she knew us very well, and so she moved in. We were far away and had no connections with her. However, one of the other women who worked in the consulate, a super Nazi, reported that Miss Jantzen had moved into the house of a Jew, and eventually Miss Jantzen lost her job at the consulate. It was apparently sufficient that she lived in a house, which belonged to us at that time. So you could not blame people for staying away from us, because nobody knew what might eventually happen to them if they associated with us.

Due to these circumstances, Altschul left the Club *Concordia* and the KR&AC around 1938 or 1939 (p. 40). Other Jews and the few anti-Nazis in Japan had been excluded from German

²⁵ Even though Altschul knew the name, he did not mention it in his recollections. See Herweg, in: Herweg, Pekar, Spang, 2014, pp. 138-139. In a letter addressed to Heinz Altschul, his friend Arthur Pawlenka not only mentioned the name of the “super Nazi” but told Altschul more details about Mrs. Möbus' commitment to Nazi ideals. See Pawlenka to Altschul, 15 February 1983, OAG Archive, Tokyo.

institutions much earlier, leading to a strong feeling of isolation for many of them.²⁶ In Altschul's case, his family and some foreign friends allowed him to get through this period without affecting his positive approach to life. Generally, the situation of Jews in Japan largely depended on their employers, who were often pressured either by the local representatives of the Nazi Party, the German embassy or by Japanese officials to release their Jewish-German employees. Yet, quite a few companies resisted these demands for some time at least. Winckler & Co. was in this sense just one example. But finally, they had to release Altschul. Yet they did this not without arranging for some money to be paid to him on a monthly basis:²⁷

1938/39 (p. 41): “[...] Winckler & Co., for whom I worked, started to get into trouble as they were pestered constantly by the Nazis to do something about me, to get rid of me or whatever, and they had a hard time at the beginning.”

1939-41 (p. 44): “My firm Winckler & Co. was put under constant pressure to get rid of me, or to at least limit my working time at the offices as much as possible. Winckler & Co. had to be very careful, and told me that I should try to stay away as much as possible so as not to get them into any difficulties. Later, shortly before the war started [in the Pacific] in December 1941, I began staying away completely, and was no longer officially on the staff of Winckler & Co.”

1941/42 (p. 46): “Mrs. Selig, the wife of one of the senior partners, told the office to pay me a hundred yen every month out of her personal account as long as these conditions existed, and I will never forget her generosity. It was a great help, but not sufficient to pay for our living expenses.”

Altschul made some of the most fascinating observations in the late 1930s when he was still working for Winckler & Co. After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), he noticed remarkable psychological changes within former Japanese colleagues when they revisited the company after having spent some time in the Imperial Army or Navy. Following this impressive account, Altschul reports how the remains of the war dead were brought back to their families. Both sections are moving documents of the changes within Japanese society during the late 1930s and early 40s (pp. 50-51):

A few of our Japanese employees in Winckler & Co. were called to the Army or Navy, and there were some goodbye parties [organized] by their colleagues. When some of these men later visited the company in uniform as Army or Navy men, their personalities seemed to be completely changed. Whereas in civilian life they had been very quiet and polite, they now were quite arrogant and offish. It was amazing to see the changes in people you had known for years, and perhaps this explained why the Japanese military was often aggressive and cruel. Later I heard from some of the young fellows who had been inducted, that they were treated very badly in their training, often slapped around and harshly disciplined, so that it was no wonder that they in turn acted in a similar way when confronting other people. The change was very remarkable.

There was the other side of the coin, by which I mean that dead soldiers arrived back at home in growing numbers. They were brought on special trams, which were draped in black cloth. Inside, every seat was occupied by a young recruit in brand new uniform, each with a white face mask over his mouth, and each holding on his lap a white box containing the ashes of a fallen soldier. When these trams, usually two or three in a row, approached, people on the

²⁶ An example of this is the isolation of the German anti-Nazi Dr. Bruno Petzold, who taught at the First High School in Tokyo. See Schauwecker, 12/2009, pp. 33-35, where some related comments by Petzold's Japanese acquaintances are quoted.

²⁷ Nakamura, 2009, p. 451, explains the legal background of this the following way: “In September 1938, at the request of the Ortsgruppen, the German diplomatic establishments in China and Japan ordered German companies and merchants to get rid of their Jewish employees by 1 January 1939.” The 100 yen that Altschul got from Mrs. Selig was generous but not enough to continue living the expatriate lifestyle the family had enjoyed before.

street stood still and bowed deeply as the trams went by. I tried as much as possible to avoid these situations, as they made me very uncomfortable about what to do. These scenes were repeated in the many weeks and months of the war.

After Altschul was forced to leave Winckler & Co., he began selling some of his family’s furniture and glassware to make ends meet. Next, he took an irregular part-time job in Osaka for a while. Later, the family moved to a more rural area, where he began raising chickens and organized the necessary chicken feed not only for his own small flock but also for others, obtaining some money for delivering it by bicycle. He also started his own so-called “victory garden”. In wartime Japan, every empty and unused space was transformed into these gardens, where ordinary people started to grow vegetables for their own families. Rather more often than one would expect in Japan, Altschul’s crops were stolen, though. Once, the thieves left the plants intact but stole the sweet potatoes underneath, undoubtedly a particularly deceitful way of stealing (pp. 59-60).

When food rationing started, Heinz Altschul had to collect his rations at one place while Hanni and Bob had to go to Club *Concordia* to collect theirs. About the same time, German officials as well as some “friends” counseled Hanni to get a divorce, a fact that Altschul recalled decades later the following way (p. 41):

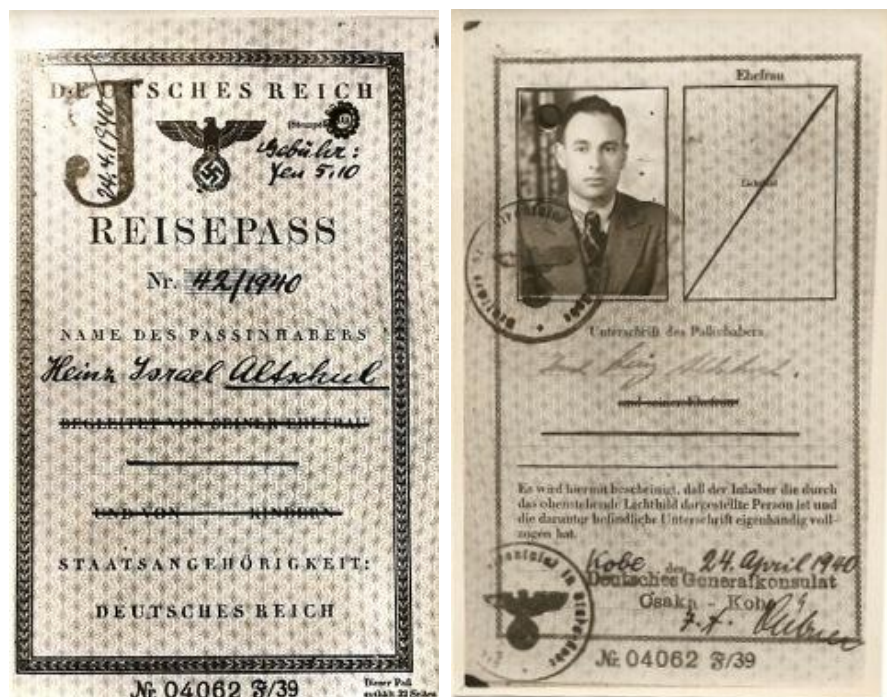
Also at this time, my wife was called to the German consulate, where they tried to influence her to get a divorce from me for her own and our boy’s benefit. She, of course, flatly refused, and that was the end of that particular matter at that time. But there were also some in Kobe, mothers of classmates of our boy in school, who talked to Hanni and tried to show her that it really would be better for her and the boy if she would separate from me. Of course, this all did not carry any weight with her, but it made things certainly more difficult for all of us.

This episode was not the only time when dealings with the German consulate were a source of discontent. In accordance with Nazi legislation, Heinz Altschul’s passport was altered in 1940 by inserting “Israel” as his second name and stamping a big “J” for “Jude” (Jew) into it.²⁸ It is especially thought-provoking to see that there is no entry for his wife (*Ehefrau*), a fact that Altschul does not even mention. As

Hanni Altschul was – according to Nazi laws – “Aryan”, she had obviously been deleted from his passport. In 1941, Heinz Altschul, like all other German Jews abroad, was deprived of his German citizenship altogether.

Pictures 3 & 4

Heinz Altschul’s passport after a capital “J” (for Jew) as well as the compulsory new middle name “Israel” had been added on 24 April 1940.



²⁸ Altschul, 2014, p. 41, mentions the year 1939 as the time when the “J” was inserted but the picture of his passport shows 24 April 1940 as the date of these changes.

Due to such events as the war with China, the growing tensions between Japan and the USA and the arrest of the Soviet spy Richard Sorge in autumn 1941,²⁹ the Japanese became very suspicious of foreigners. One thing that had become dangerous was taking photographs.³⁰ In his recollections, Altschul reports two incidences in which he ended up being questioned in police stations because of this. The more interesting one is quoted below. In this case, Altschul and his friends had not taken a single picture, but the mere fact that they possessed cameras was enough for them to be questioned “in pretty rough tones” and detained for hours (pp. 62-64):

One time [...] in 1938 [...] we decided to make a trip by car to Amanohashidate.³¹ [...] Now we knew that on the way [...] we would pass through the area of Maizuru, which had a naval base that was very strictly watched, and where you had to be very careful.³² We packed all our cameras away, so that there would be no problem whatsoever that anybody could say we had taken pictures. In Japan long before World War II started, there was a great fear of spies, and of course every foreigner was considered a potential spy. [...] As we drove to Amanohashidate [...] all of a sudden I was standing in front of a gate with a Japanese navy patrol standing guard. We had taken a wrong turn a mile or so before, and had run right into the naval base. [...] before I had any chance to move my car, there were two police cars behind us. The policemen requested us in pretty rough tones to immediately follow them. In the police station the first question of course was about pictures and cameras, and we told them [...] that we had cameras but had not taken any pictures. At first they did not believe us, and threatened that they would open all the cameras and destroy all the films. Wohlrab and Hupfer told them [...] we were German, and if they did not trust us when we told them that we did not take any pictures, it would be just too bad. Well, they began phoning, checking our identities in Kobe and elsewhere [...]. We were in that police station at least two to three hours being dressed down. Finally, we were let go [...]. Our experience showed how careful one had to be [...].

One aspect that Altschul discusses at some length is the case of a certain “Mr. Hata”, who turned out to be a secret agent of the *Kenpeitai* (Military Police), and tried to sound him out and to induce him to make some remarks about Japan losing the war, which could then have been used against him. This section shows again how cautious foreigners in Japan had to be in the 1930s and 40s (pp. 69-72):

During the summer of 1944, a young Japanese arrived at our house and introduced himself as Mr. Hata. He told me that a friend of his had told him that there was a German family living here, and since he had studied German in school, he was eager to practice his German with us. This was not unusual with Japanese students. None of us liked Mr. Hata very much [...] Well, Mr. Hata came almost every day for a while [...]. [...] We made all kinds of excuses to try to keep him away, but it did not do much good. [...] Then all of a sudden, it must have been in June or July 1944, he told us that Saipan had fallen, and that now the war for Japan was lost. Here again we were very careful; I told him that this did not mean a darn thing, that this was just one of the small islands. I tried to water down whatever he told us and not to appear that I was taking sides in any way, because I just did not trust him. This kept on going for many weeks. Then one day, when I came back from picking up my food ration in Kobe and stepped out of the Hankyū train at the Ashiyagawa station, here was Mr. Hata sitting on a

²⁹ Richard Sorge was born in Baku in 1895 to a German father and a Russian mother. He was a journalist and Soviet spy in China (1930-33) and Japan (1933-41). He informed Moscow about the imminent attack of Nazi-Germany and that Japan did not intend to join the assault in the Far East. See Whyman, 1996, for more details.

³⁰ Further examples for this can be found in Rudolf Voll's recollections in Ehmcke & Pantzer, 2000, pp. 105-107.

³¹ Amanohashidate is a 3km-long sandbar covered with thousands of pine trees reaching into the Sea of Japan. Along with Miyajima (near Hiroshima) and Matsushima (near Sendai), it is considered one of the three most scenic spots in Japan.

³² Maizuru is a small town in central Honshū (Kyoto prefecture). Since the early twentieth century, the Japanese naval headquarters for the Sea of Japan has been located there.

bench. He saw me right away, told me that he was now a member of the Kenpeitai, and he showed me his identification card. The Kenpeitai was Japan's secret police, equivalent to the German Gestapo. I told him, well, that was a good thing for him [...]. [...] At another time, Mr. Hata told me that his brother was an employee of [...] the City Hall in Kobe, and that [...] in case of further advances by the American forces, all foreigners would have to be evacuated from the coastal areas, including us, too. He told me that [...] we were probably going to be sent to a little village on Lake Biwa, and once we were gone, his brother would move into our house. I said, [...] I do not care who moves into our house once we have left [...]. Anyhow, Mr. Hata constantly acted as a kind of provocateur, and I did not like it at all, but after the meeting at the station we did not see him anymore. After the war, on our ship traveling to the United States in October 1946, I met an American [...] who had been imprisoned in Kobe [...]. I asked him if he met Mr. Hata. He told me that he made it a point to file a special claim against Mr. Hata, because he had been one of the worst people he had ever met; Mr. Hata was acting as an interpreter at the prison, although his German certainly was not good enough [...]. Whenever the people who were questioned by the police gave an answer which Mr. Hata did not like, he hit them over the legs [...]. [...] This episode in our life with Mr. Hata was not very pleasant, and it showed us that we really had to be very careful not to run afoul of authorities. One word from a fellow like Mr. Hata to the police or the Kenpeitai would have been enough to put one of us into prison, and once you were inside, they were in no hurry to let you go. You were guilty until proven innocent, and nobody was in a hurry to prove that. I knew a few people who were imprisoned during the war in Japan, and they had a very rough time, and some of them died.

In relation with the permanent surveillance of foreigners, it must be mentioned here that Japanese servants frequently acted as (secret) informers as well. This meant anyone who employed local staff was almost constantly under scrutiny (pp. 54-55):

All servants who worked for foreigners were drilled by the police to report regularly about what took place in the household. So the police was fully informed of every step we made, of every visitor who came to us, of every place where we went visiting. [...] One had to be very careful to use proper words or not saying anything at all, in order not to be suspected of being anti-Japanese or, worse, a spy. Quite a few foreigners ended up at least being interrogated by the police, and in some cases being imprisoned.

Altschul also provided a first-hand observation of the American attack on Kobe on 18 April 1942. To conduct this so-called Doolittle Raid, the US Navy used sixteen of its brand new B-25 medium-range bombers. Specially prepared planes started from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet to attack Tokyo (10 planes), Yokohama (3), Nagoya (2), as well as Kobe (1). Following the attacks, the pilots tried to reach China because the B-25 was not able to land on any carrier. These raids were militarily irrelevant but they were nevertheless psychologically important. The fact that one of these planes went to Kobe is little known. For that reason, Altschul's report of the attack is a worthwhile reminder of this early episode of the Pacific War (pp. 47-48):

[...] I happened to be with Bob in one of the shopping streets not too far from our house, when all of a sudden sirens sounded all over, and people rushed back and forth very excitedly, not really knowing what was going on. And all of a sudden, an airplane flew overhead, and Bob said to me, 'that is not a Japanese plane.' I had not noticed it, and the craft had disappeared as quickly as it had come and a few minutes later we heard some explosions far away on the other side of Kobe. And as it later turned out, it was one of the Doolittle planes, which had been coming from an aircraft carrier, had flown to Kobe, and proceeded on to China. My wife Hanni had also seen the plane from the balcony; it was so low that she practically was on eye level with it. So there was big excitement, which gradually subsided, and no real big damage was done. But, of course, it made a big impression, and it showed that Japan could be attacked, too.

As the war proceeded, air raids became more and more frequent. One interesting aspect that Altschul's recollections reveal is how foreign residents reacted to this threat to their life and belongings. In Kobe at least, many foreigners apparently exchanged large suitcases with personal effects, so that not everything was lost in case one's house got destroyed in an air raid. Only personal reminiscences like Heinz Altschul's can reveal these kinds of private dealings (p. 58):

So we packed a large sea trunk with clothes for Hanni, our boy and myself, and we left it with a Swiss family, Mr. Kaufman and his wife, in their house in Takarazuka. Also, we left some of our more valuable things like silverware with our very good friends Mr. and Mrs. Zeller, also a Swiss family living in Shioya [...] [,] an English-built compound, which the Americans knew about, and which we were sure they would not bomb.

A few hours before an atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima, the house in which the Altschuls lived was hit by an incendiary bomb and burned down.³³ This meant that their situation was particularly stern in early August 1945. Furthermore, it was apparently clear that the destruction of Hiroshima (only about 250km from Kobe) added a new aspect to the already precarious situation. Altschul's report also shows again the constant threat foreigners in wartime Japan were faced with: the fear of being seen as a spy by the Japanese (p. 90):

Our house was bombed and burned down [...] in the morning of 6 August. Later that morning we got news that [...] an atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima earlier that morning [...]. [...] There was much speculating and guessing, but it was clear that this was a very special event. While we were on the station platform waiting for the train to Shioya, American planes dropped leaflets which fluttered all over the city of Kobe.³⁴ Some fell on the station platform, and a few people grabbed some of them. We as foreigners did not dare to do anything, because we felt we were always under suspicion [...]. Later I learned that the content of these leaflets was an invitation to surrender [...].

One week later, Japan capitulated. Heinz Altschul did not listen to Hirohito's famous radio broadcast himself, but was first informed that the emperor had declared that the war would go on, before someone else told him that this was not true and that the emperor had, in fact, proclaimed the end of the war (p. 94). This is one of numerous examples showing that Hirohito's speech was initially misunderstood by many listeners.³⁵

On 15 August 1945, it was announced that the emperor would make a proclamation at noontime [...]. I happened to be in Dr. Hudececk's office that morning, and when twelve o'clock approached, the doctor, his Japanese nurse, and one of his Japanese assistants went [...] to a place that had a radio. [...] In half an hour or so, the three came filing back into the office with very grim faces, the assistant shaking his head and saying, 'Nothing is happening, the war is going to keep going.' [...] I left and walked down the street, only to run into someone from the German Club who called to me, 'Well it's all over now.' I said, 'What do you mean? I just heard that the emperor said that the war was to be continued.' He replied, 'No, no, no, that's not true; [...] he accepted unconditional surrender, and told his people [...] that the war would be over, and that they should remain calm and follow all forthcoming instructions.' The reason for the confusion was that many people, including my doctor and his staff, did not understand the language spoken by the emperor, a special type of court language which almost nobody could understand.

³³ Selden, 2014, mentions the 1988 anime *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*), which is set in Kobe in 1945 and shows the American air raids and their effects.

³⁴ The US-Army leaflets dropped over Japanese cities in 1945 warned the Japanese that their cities might be destroyed soon. There is some controversy about the question of whether these leaflets included clear hints about the atomic bomb before Hiroshima or only thereafter.

³⁵ Similar statements exist from other Germans living in Japan at the time. See Claus Correns and Irmgard Grimm in Ehmcke/Pantzer, 2000, p. 95 (Correns) and p. 207 (Grimm).

After the actual signing of the surrender aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945, Japan was occupied by Allied forces. In this connection, Altschul's report about the arrival of the US army in Kobe presents an interesting view of these events. According to him, the initially very tense atmosphere changed very quickly (pp. 95-96):

I remember that one day early in September, I went with a Swiss family by the name of Broeck to the Sannomiya train station in downtown Kobe because we had heard that the first American occupation troops were being unloaded there. We waited at the bottom of the station on the "kokudō", the main highway linking Kobe to Osaka, and there came the troops out of the station, and lining up on the street. We talked to some of them; one was a minister, who had the cross insignia on his uniform. They were all very nice and very friendly to us. It was here, too, that we saw our first Jeep. We had often read in the papers about this mystery vehicle which had been used through the entire war and had proven to be very essential. It was exciting to finally see one. There was great uncertainty among the American troops, because they did not know how the Japanese population would behave and what was going to happen in this first encounter. The soldiers checked their arms, they had their bayonets and revolvers handy, and they marched into the city. It was towards evening, five o'clock or so, and slowly getting dark, and there were no Japanese to be seen. They were all in their houses, hiding and probably fearful. In the closing days of the war they had been told terrible stories about the Americans, how they would kill people and rape women, and would do all kinds of bad things to them. As the troops moved in, the Japanese were completely invisible, perhaps looking through slits in doors and windows, watching the troops moving by. Well, the whole evening and night passed completely without any incidents or disturbances, and the next day everything returned to normal: the Japanese were outside their houses and found that the American soldiers were terrific, very nice, very helpful, and tried very hard to be friendly. There were regulations that the troops should not fraternize with the local population, but nevertheless they were very normal, very helpful, and in a very short time everything returned to normal. The local population intermingled with the troops, there were no more arms at the ready, and normal daily life returned.

After Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) General Douglas MacArthur and his forces had securely taken over the administration of Japan, Altschul found some employment with the occupation forces, working for the American Red Cross at the Enlisted Men's Leave Hotel (Ryoraku Hotel) in Kyoto.

Picture 5
The Ryoraku Hotel



The Red Cross was apparently very content with Altschul. At the end of his employment, he received a certificate, which stated “his knowledge of Japanese and his efficient management of the Japanese staff of seventy-six was invaluable.” The American superiors concluded that “his work was of the highest quality” and described him as “a highly desirable employee.”³⁶ In autumn 1946, Altschul left Japan with his family. They immigrated to the USA, where he worked in New York City until 1972. Then, he and his wife moved to the San Diego area to spend their retirement in California, where he recorded his recollections in 1989.

4) Concluding remarks

In his memoirs, Altschul nowhere says why he recorded them in that particular year, i.e., in 1989. However, the fact that he mentions Hirohito’s funeral in addition to his recollection of being in Japan when Emperor Taishō died in 1926 (p. 25), seem to indicate that Hirohito’s death on 7 January 1989 made him realize that it was about time to save his life story for relatives and friends. Additionally, Heinz Altschul’s earlier correspondence with Arthur Pawlenka, a former colleague at Winckler & Co., must have brought back many memories.³⁷

Surprisingly, Altschul’s recollections, recorded decades after the events, turn out to be rather mellow when criticizing local Nazis. Mostly, he talks about his family’s life as well as about the foreign community in Kobe. Among his comments about Japanese society, his reports about the *Kenpeitai* and the Japanese fear of foreign spies are very revealing, but arguably his comments about the changing character of drafted soldiers and the return of the ashes of fallen combatants are most striking by vividly recreating the eerie atmosphere of the time.

Picture 6. Heinz Altschul in a reflective moment.



³⁶ The certificate is dated 8 October 1946 and is available at the OAG archive, Tokyo.

³⁷ For information about Pawlenka, see Herweg, in: Herweg, Pekar, Spang, 2014, p. 128. Various letters exchanged between Altschul and Pawlenka (1983-85) are available in the OAG Archive, Tokyo.

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About the author: Dr. Christian W. Spang is an associate professor at Daitō Bunka University in Tokyo/Saitama. His research interests are German-Japanese relations and early 20th-century geopolitics. In June 2013, his German language volume *Karl Haushofer und Japan (Karl Haushofer and Japan. The Reception of his geopolitical ideas in German and Japanese Politics)* appeared in the monograph series of the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ). In spring 2014, he co-edited Heinz Altschul's recollections. Soon, the co-authored OAG-history is going to be published with Iudicium (Munich) as *Die Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens (OAG), 1873-1979*.