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Developing Meiji Japan - The Edmund Naumann Contribution

Abstract

Right after the opening of the country following a long phase of political and cultural seclusion called sakoku from 1639-1853, and the following Meiji Restoration in 1868 with the advent of a constitutional monarchy, the Japanese government started a concerted and broad-banded action for the development of industry, science and technology, constitutional and civil law, military, medicine and other critical sectors for the building of a Japanese nation. In order to avoid becoming turned into a colony by foreign nations, knowledge and personnel from outside was attracted. One of the most relevant initiatives in the area of science and technology was the general move towards the fostering of a geological survey structure which led to the foundation of the first state run scientific research institution of the country, the Geological Survey of Japan, nowadays under the umbrella of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Several programmatic papers initiating this process came from the desk of the German geologist Edmund Naumann who served in Japan as a “hired foreigner” (o-yatoi gaikokujin) between 1875 and 1885. While the German or English original source papers are lost and it is not known whether the author had any working command of the Japanese language. pro parte translation and analysis of the bungo style formal Japanese texts prepared for the Japanese Minister Itō Hirobumi and his cabinet reveal the line of reasoning, showing significant similarities to very recent debates in geosciences.

Both the regular use of geological methods as a means of scientific support for industrial and societal development, particularly in the fields of mining and smelting, as well as transport and logistics, natural hazard reduction water management or environmental protection, and the implementation of a state financed research system for the sake of industrial as well as political stakeholders, were new to Japan. It seems reasonable to assume that the very intense Japanese governmental colonialization moves against China, Russia, Korea and in other parts of Asia would not have been possible without the firm material basement prepared earlier with the foreign support. Judging from a global scale, as the only non-Western nation among the great powers, Japan occupied a special position in the history of international relations in the late 19th and the early 20th century.

CV

Andreas Nikolaus Küppers is a trained geologist with a broad spectrum of experience and research interests including works in palaeontology, historical geology, as well as regional geology, economic geology and mining, hydrogeology and engineering geology with scientific continental drilling. During his years in Japan he was able to visit a large portion

of active mining and smelting industries throughout the country. Most recent activities are centred around early warning systems and the protection of cultural assets, as well as the history of geoscience with special focus on the German-Japanese relations in science and policy. Currently, besides some freelance activities, he serves as affiliate to the Warning Research Centre of UCL and is involved in the setup of a European Researchers network named The Potsdam Conventus.