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In 1861 January 24th, the first *Trade-, Friendship- and Shipping Treaty* was signed between the Kingdom of Prussia and the last Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu. The far-sighted Otto von Bismarck, at that time acting as Prussian Prime Minister, laid the fundament of friendship to the country afar – a friendship which German visitors may perceive in Japan even after 150 years.

Chris Silenker

Japan – admired by surprise

150 Years of Friendship
Germany – Japan

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Fuji-san

picture taken on board of the high speed train SHINKANSEN Series N700 by a tiny Sony Camera. Japan's holy mountain is so magnificent, that he stays firm and unimpressed by the passing by velocity of 300km/h.

Japan – admired by surprise



日独交流150周年
Jahre Freundschaft
Deutschland – Japan

It has become fashionable to look down on Japan. The USA and Europe don't seem to stop predicting Japan's demise, formerly a noteworthy example in all areas, foremost the economy. Once arrived in the country the visitor from the West hardly perceives any deterioration of the situation. After the triple disaster of 03/11/2011 – earthquake, tsunami, nuclear accident at Fukushima – Tokyo flashes and sparkles, even though more nuclear power plants were shut down as a precaution. At the hotel only a notice attached to the elevator indicates that one of them is shut down from 9 a. m to

of our 10. President. She must have put on a lot of make up to cover the huge tattoo on her right upper arm., I thought on the occasion of a visit to Mannheim's Reiss Engelhorn Museum in October 2011, where the Wulff couple, she in a strapless evening dress, were pictured in a large photo with Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. Naruhito and Wulff were the patrons of the exhibition marking 150 years of German Japanese relations. There were many precious exhibition items – such as the Imperial limousine, a Mercedes of 1936.



In Japan tattoos are disreputable because they could indicate connection to the Yakuza, a kind of Japanese mafia. Judging from the signs at many, if not most, onsens*), the traditional Japanese baths in hot springs, Ms. Wulff would have been asked to refrain from using the baths because of her tattoo; most likely the usual intensive washing and rinsing before entering the bath the covering make up would have come off and exposed her tattoo. Most baths have a sign at the entrance, in politely couched language: »Persons with tattoos are asked to refrain from using the facilities.«



Tokyo City – Shinbashi

The Locomotion is a perfect, meeting point, easily to find. Despite the Fukushima catastrophe there is no reduction of illumination – but all in LED energy saving mode, of course!

4 p.m. due to power savings. One is advised to use one of the five other elevators.

Otherwise Tokyo's trains run every other minute, even during off-peak hours and half empty. The passengers are well dressed, without visible body piercings or tattoos. This reminds me of Bettina Wulff, the second wife

Employed, old and ... fit

The unemployment rate in Japan is 4.2 percent, only half as high as in the United States. In Europe the

*) *The Japanese Correspondent of Süddeutschen Zeitung reports from the popular Tokyo Onsen Oedo and off limits for Tattoo (SZ 9.2.2012, Nr. 33 page 37)*
www.oedoonsen.jp/higaeri/english/info.html

number of unemployed claimants is also higher than in Japan, Spain topping the list with 22.9 percent. The aging of Japanese society – nowhere else are there so many centenarians – is lamented everywhere. A child born today in Japan has an average life expectancy of 83 years. Viewed from the United States one could advise the Japanese to adapt the American body mass index and health system, and stick to it to reduce their 5 year lead in life expectancy to the U.S. levels. A noteworthy fact is that second and third generation of Americans of Japanese ancestry in the United States do not share Japan's inherited life expectancy but will die on average at the same age of 72,5 years completely in line of their current environment. The American way of life is more and more copied around the globe and might become their one and only export success. Reducing life ex-

pectancy due to poverty and adipositas flanked by a rotten health care system might become the »remedy« to the demographical challenge.

Everything new

Thirty years ago, Japan raised a furor in the automotive sector. The Japanese cars became highly popular; the German institute for monitoring safety matters (TECHNISCHER ÜBERWACHUNGS VEREIN TÜV) saw the cars from Japan in terms of quality and flawlessness in its annual reports always in the top range. Only when the Japanese cars were long enough on the German market, deficiencies increased above those of their counterparts of the German premium brands like Mercedes, BMW and Audi, after five years on the road. Long life does not belong to Japanese understanding and one will rarely see an old automobile. The society ap-



Tokyo City – the modern Business District in Shinjuku and a traditional habitat in Chidori:

Japanese buildings were pulled down every 20 to 30 years. Less than 5% of houses in Japan were erected before 1950, while in Vienna, Paris and London 20% of the buildings date earlier than 1918.



proaches new technologies open minded and is less critical about unexplored, potential risks. In Japan one could hardly think of concerns about electromagnetic smog which is a continuous long time matter of discussion in Germany. New generations

ding ground is so exorbitantly expensive, relatively little investment is put into the construction of buildings. While real estate is a valuable investment in the West, the market value in Japan drops below the value of tax depreciation after 15 years. It is therefore not profitable to inherit a house or condo. Considering the high life expectancy, the Japanese lose their home several times in their life due to demolition; each time they have to move into a newly erected building and have to spend a lot of money what a waste of resources!

Like in one's childhood

I still remember the surprise in the face of a Japanese friend who after more than three decades came back to the city in Germany where she had spent her childhood. Even from the highway, she still could recognize the so called Berliner Siedlung (Berlin settlement), a series of five high-rise buildings on the outskirts of Mainz. She had lived with her family in the middle one of the 16 storey residential towers, which were built in the beginning of the 60s for refugees.

She was entranced by the unexpected view. »That would have never happened in Japan. After so many years you would not recognize the place«, she said, »more modern and larger high rise buildings would have replaced all the old ones. Due to the damage caused by the many earthquakes, the houses are very stressed, therefore at the latest after 35 years they must be torn down.« I suggested to go in and take the elevator to the 9th floor, where she used to live. Her surprise was unbelievable. Everything appeared to her like before, but well-maintained and technically up to date.



Sculpture of Berlin Bear, placed at the entrance of Berlin Quarter in Mainz, is from newer times – but the settlement was erected in the sixties.

The Japanese family is delighted to stumble across their former housing area – almost unchanged and in excellent shape after more than 30 years.

of computers, game consoles, mobile phones, navigation devices are selling like hot cakes and penetrate the market in the shortest possible time.

»Everything new« also applies to the construction sector whether it concerns a narrow detached house, a multi storey apartment building or a skyscraper. After 20 to 30 years they will be demolished. Because the build

Even the kindergarden and the school were almost unchanged – an experience one cannot encounter in Japan.

Old Novelties

Even the traditional ancient monuments need a regular reconstruction. Some Buddhist temples and many Shinto shrines are torn down at certain intervals. The idea behind is that the aura of a sanctuary will suffer if only repaired and not renewed; e.g. at the Shintoist highest Sanctuary in Ise the ceremonial symbols of Amaterasu, the Goddess of Sun, are transferred every 20 years to a newly built shrine close to the old one. After eight years of preparation the next transfer of the holy treasures will take place at the beginning of October 2013. It is its 62nd reconstruction; the complex houses more than a hundred buildings which are to be rebuilt according to plans handed down through the centuries. In the final period many artisans work simultaneously at the area, exercising their traditional crafts. Due to the system »Old Gets New« the skills are perpetually in use and passed on to future generations.

The immense expenses for the reconstruction of the shrine is balanced by the never ceasing flow of pilgrims in the first three years after the transfer to the new location, generating a higher revenue for the region. Investment into the infrastructure will be increased to accommodate the mass of worshippers and tourists inspired by the shrine transfer – new hotels and roads will be built. This seems dearly needed. If instead of the toll road one chooses Main Highway Nr. 368, leading from Osaka to Ise, a big surprise occurs approximately 30 kilometres before the final destina-



tion, close to Matsusaka. The broad highway narrows down to a mountainous single road with occasional passing places. Numerous serpentine roads lead down into the valley – a highlight for drivers with alpine know-how.

Two years before the shrine transfer, the town Ise seems to be a Sleeping Beauty in the Woods. The Outer Shrine was totally deserted after dusk one day at the end of November 2011. Nevertheless this quietness in front of Japan's holiest shrine was appreciated as a rare gift at an otherwise busy place, where sightseers and pilgrims can look only at the hidden: A high wooden fence and the outside of the shrine prevent the ordinary people to get a glance at the holiest of holies.

On the other side, the nearby tiny rocky islands of Me'oto Iwa are open to the public any time. However, the two rocks, which symbolize husband and wife, were never rebuilt – only the ties between them, a heavy rope »Shimenawa« made of rice straw, will be renewed several times in the year ■

Me'oto Iwa, the »married rocks«, are situated in the Pacific south-east of Ise.

Mostly the photographs show the big Mr. Rock tied to his smaller Mrs. Rock.

This picture however shows in addition their child – already a little bit separated from the parents.

Tanuki

Fairytale: A Raccoon Dog



in its genuine habitat, which means the garden of Ryokan Kangetsu in Chidori (see below - this Tanuki might be addicted to Coke).

Obviously the German Japanese friendship of 150 years lead not only to the explosive development of scientific disciplines but also to the skills of decorating house and garden. In both countries more and more people found an interest to put figurines in their yards. The serial production of garden gnomes had begun in Thuringia (Eastern Germany) at the end of the 19th century. Currently, the dwarfish population in German front yards is estimated to stand at about 25 millions pieces in addition one would have a hard time to ignore the cute Hummel figures spread over vitrines and shelves in so many German homes. There must have been a similar development in Japan. The pottery making city of Tokoname on the Chita peninsula south of Nagoya, is famous for its

»Winking Cat *maneki neko*«. Thanks to numerous Chinese plagiats the cat has become an ubiquitous resident in Germany.

But in Germany, there is still an unfulfilled demand for the Tanuki, even though the animal itself, the raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*), has managed to immigrate with great success to Western Europe from East Asia since the 1950s. As garden decoration, the Tanuki is equipped with a straw hat and a sake bottle and comes from Shigaraki, another centre for pottery, near Kyoto. According to legend the Tanuki is a good natured rogue with huge testicles, which stand for the promise of good luck. One can hardly imagine that this legendary sexy creature from Japan would replace the rather asexual garden gnomes (if you discount their beards) in Germany's front yards ■



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