

CHAPTER 13

Japanese-German Military History from an Archival Perspective¹ **Archive Situation in Japan and Germany**

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If we disregard the relations between Germany and Japan before the Meiji period (beginning in 1868) and before the founding of the German Empire in 1871, the national archives in both countries are of particular interest for German-Japanese relations. While the Federal Republic of Germany is a federal state with 16 federal states, Japan is a central state with 47 prefectures. The prefectures function as the middle level of administration between the central government in Tokyo and the cities and municipalities, which are the lowest administrative level. This administrative structure is reflected in Japan's public archives landscape, as there are prefectural archives and city and municipal archives in addition to the National Archives of Japan.² In addition, public archives include archives of Japan's state universities, the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the archive of the Ministry of Defense, the archive of the Imperial Household, and the archive of the National Institute of Japanese Literature. Currently, there are 103 public archives in Japan (as of 2019). Except for the Imperial Household Archives, founded in 1869, all of Japan's public archives are postwar creations: Japan Literature Archives founded in 1951; Japan National Archives founded in 1971; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives founded in 1971; Ministry of Defense Archives founded in 2001. Located in the Chiyoda district of Tokyo, with a second home in Tsukuba established in 1998, the National Archives is the central archive of the Japanese government and houses holdings of the Japanese governments from the Meiji (1868–1912), Taishō (1912–1926), Shōwa (1926–1989), and

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² The following is taken from National Archives of Japan [Kokuritsu Kōbun Shokan], ed. by National Archives of Japan, 2017, <www.archives.go.jp>; Zierer, Martin: Das Japanische Nationalarchiv. Eindrücke von einem Besuch im April 2007, in *Der Archivar* 3/2008, S. 298 f.

Heisei (1989–2019) periods and the ending Edo (1600–1868) period. In addition to these archival holdings, the National Archives of Japan still manages the Meiji era Cabinet Library, and serves as the final archive for the Cabinet, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Ministry of Health and Welfare. The National Archives of Japan currently holds 72 shelf kilometers of records, 35 of which are located in Tokyo and 37 in Tsukuba. Records are appraised on a statutory basis (Public Archives Law (Archives Law) of 1987 and National Archives Law of 1999) in close consultation between the Cabinet and the National Archives. So-called transfer plans regulate the transfer of documents from the ministries to the National Archives. The Cabinet, and especially the Prime Minister, plays an influential role in this process, as the cassation of records after the expiration of the retention period in the ministries is possible in principle before consultation with the National Archives. Records worthy of archiving include written materials that provide information about the political actions of the state, legal documents that are of interest to citizens, written materials that concern nature, the environment and society, written materials that are important to the history, culture, science of Japan, and finally written materials that concern national events. In addition, the Cabinet may designate important documents to be archived. After disinfection, indexing and cataloging in a database, which is done at the record level, the archival materials are digitized and made available to the public within one year, unless special legal regulations prevent this. Storage in the stack area takes place at 55% relative humidity and a constant 22°C.

On a national level, Germany has the so-called Bundesarchiv, which is responsible for the historical records of the Federal Republic and its legal predecessors.³ In addition to the Federal Archives as the national archive, there are 16 state or regional archives responsible for the records of the federal states and their territorial predecessor institutions. For the Japanese historian, who is not familiar with the federal system of Germany, a complicated situation arises, since the federal character of the German administration finds its counterpart in the

³ Franz, Eckhart, Lux, Thomas: Einführung in die Archivkunde, Darmstadt 2018, p. 25.

archival system.⁴ In addition to the Federal Archives as the central institution for the records of the Federal Republic and its legal predecessors (the German Reich), there are the Political Archives of the Foreign Office as the old registry with final archival function for the Foreign Office and the Federal Archives Military Archives (BA-MA) as the archives for the records of the German military and the German armed forces in Freiburg im Breisgau. Two main sites (Koblenz and Berlin-Lichterfelde) and additional sites in Bayreuth (Lastenausgleichsarchiv) and at Fehrbelliner Platz (Filmarchiv) obviously make it difficult for the Japanese researcher to comprehend the structure of the German archival system when, in addition to the Bundesarchiv, there are other state archives of the federal states that come into question for sources for German-Japanese relations.

In Japan, as in Germany, there are national archives for the records of the federal and central governments, respectively, while in both cases it can be stated that the ministries of foreign affairs and defense each maintain their own archives. In terms of sheer quantity, the Federal Archives currently hold 7.6 times more shelf kilometers of files and 11.6 times more staff than the Japanese National Archives:

	Shelf kilometers of files (km)	Staff (person)
Japan	72	188
Germany	488	2,100

Archive History

Japan and Germany can look back on a long tradition of preserving cultural assets, which is reflected in a diverse archive landscape. In both countries, written records in archives and cultural heritage institutions date back to the beginning of writing. While in Germany the separation of administrative records and archives began gradually with the French Revolution,⁵ in Japan this separation was not made until after 1945. For almost a hundred years, administrative records in Japan

⁴ Iokibe, Kaoru: Doitsu Kōbun Shokan Hōrōki, in *Rekishi Gaku Kenkyū* 2/2017, pp. 19-23; Iokibe, K.: Donyoku no Mukui. Doitsu Shiryō kara mieru Jōyaku Kaisei Shi, in *Rekihaku* 209, 7 (2018), pp. 2-5.

⁵ Eckhart, Lux, p. 20.

were managed by the authorities themselves in registries; a need for archiving was only recognized beginning in 1956, which then led to the establishment of the Japanese National Archives in 1971.⁶ In the same year, the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were established, followed by the construction of a new archive building as House II in Tsukuba in 1998 and the establishment of the archives of the Ministry of Defense in 2001. The year 1999 is significant for the Japanese National Archives because until that time it was under the Prime Minister's authority, and it was not until that year by legislation that it was recognized as an independent administrative institution. In addition, measures for a digital archive initiated in the 1990s were implemented with the opening of the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) platform in 2001. The reason for the establishment of a digital platform was the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, which Prime Minister Murayama took advantage of to make historical material available digitally to Japan's neighboring countries. However, the material available in JACAR is not "born digital material," but historical written material that is constantly being digitized. As of 2017, 2.1 million records over 30 million graphic units can be viewed there. JACAR's mission is to enable anyone interested in Japanese history: "to search and view materials anytime and anywhere for free. Users can print graphical contents and download data for free."⁷

The Federal Archives in Germany can trace its foundation back to the predecessor institution of the Reich Archives in 1919. The Bundesarchiv was founded in 1952⁸ and took over records from the Reich and its predecessor institutions dating back to 1411. While Japan can be considered more advanced and progressive than Germany in digitization, archival legislation in both countries began in 1987: Baden-Württemberg was the first state to enact an archive law in 1987, while in Japan the so-called *Kōbun Shokan Hō* archive law was enacted in the same year. With the Federal Archives Act of 1988 (amended in 2017), Germany also has an archive law at the national level.⁹

⁶ National Archives of Japan [Kokuritsu Kōbun Shokan], ed. By National Archives of Japan, 2017, p. 29; Zierer, p. 298.

⁷ National Archives of Japan [Kokuritsu Kōbun Shokan], ed. by National Archives of Japan, 2017, p. 25.

⁸ Eckhart, Lux, p. 29.

⁹ Eckhart, Lux, pp. 57-62; National Archives of Japan [Kokuritsu Kōbun Shokan], ed. by National Archives of Japan, 2017, p. 29.

In the Context of Military History

Various topics relating to Japanese-German relations until 1945 and illustrating the diversity of the mutual exchange that took place and the influence that was exerted, including some concerning military history, have been explored and studied in both Japan and Germany. In my paper, I will use these topics to expand on foci of research and use a comparison of archives and previously neglected topics to elaborate on research desiderata.

While the beginning of a joint development in the military histories of the two countries is marked by the foundation of the modern empire in Japan in 1868 and the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, their national histories are often paralleled against a backdrop of mutual exchange and influence and referred to jointly. Due to the primarily Anglo-American influence on it, historiographers have referred to both countries as “latecomers,” whereas historians influenced by leftist intellectual thought have attributed Germany a “special approach” (*Sonderweg*) on its way to becoming a parliamentary-democratic society. These judgments are principally based on a teleological view whose emergence was facilitated by the knowledge of the histories of the two countries in the 1930s, the joint alliance with fascist Italy in 1940 (Tripartite Pact) and the end of the war in 1945 and the subsequent period of occupation. Especially Germany’s role as an advisor of general staff officers on the modernization of the Japanese army, the Japanese general staff, the officer training and the top-level structure is said to have had an effect on German-Japanese relations. Particular mention should be made of the right of direct access of the general staff and the admiralty (*Immediatrecht* or *Immediatvortragsrecht*), which was introduced in the Japanese military on the basis of the Prussian-German model.¹⁰ The following men worked as military advisors in Japan from 1885 to 1890:

- Jacob Meckel (1842–1906): 1885–1888
- Hermann von Blankenburg (1851–1922): 1886–1888
- Heinrich Emin von Wildenbruch (1842–1893): 1888–1890.

¹⁰ Krebs, Gerhard: *Japan und die Preussische Armee*, in *Japan und Preußen*, ed. by Krebs, Gerhard (Monographien, hg. v. Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, Bd. 32), München 2002, pp. 125-144.

In literature, their activities are regarded as the origin of an “ill-fated affinity” (Verhängnisvolle Wahlverwandtschaft) between Japan and Germany,¹¹ which formed the basis of a particular closeness between the countries and, together with other factors, later facilitated a Japanese-German military alliance.

In the period before 1914, more than 450 Japanese officers underwent training in Germany, almost 200 of them later becoming generals and admirals.¹²

Japanese officers in Germany 1868–1914 (Person)	Those who later became generals or admirals (Person)
450	almost 200

As for the German side, no German officers underwent training in Japan prior to the Russo-Japanese War. It was only after what Japan saw as a victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 that Germany felt the urge to send officers to the country. Compared to the number of officers Japan sent, the number Germany sent to Japan was low:

German officers in Japan after 1905 (Person)
17

These data can be verified today with the aid of holdings in German and Japanese archives. On the German side, the Political Archive of the Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes – PAAA) and the Military Division of the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv – BA-MA) are the relevant institutes:¹³

¹¹ Martin, Bernd: Verhängnisvolle Wahlverwandtschaft: Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Entstehung des modernen Japan, in Deutschland in Europa. Kontinuität und Bruch, ed. by Dülffer, J., Berlin 1990, p. 97.

¹² Hartmann, Rudolf: Japanische Offiziere im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1870-1914, in Japonica Humboldtiana 11 (2007), pp. 93-158.

¹³ All figures are taken from Hartmann, Rudolf, p. 157.

PAAA (Political Archive of the Foreign Office)	BA-MA (Military Division of the Federal Archives)
<p>Japanese military and naval affairs (Militär- und Marineangelegenheiten) November 1882 to March 1920 Total: 25 volumes That is approximately 0.5 shelf meters of files</p>	<p>III Militaria Generalia 120: Files concerning the permission of Japanese personnel to enter military, education and training institutes on this side or to render service in or receive information at units on this side and the Imperial Navy. Vol. 1: January 1906–June 1911 Vol. 2: July 1911–September 1913 III Militaria Generalia 157: The admittance of Japanese princes to the German naval academy. Vol. 1: January 1887–January 1892 Vol. 2: May 1892–January 1896 IV Militaria 167: Files concerning the sending of Japanese officers, Jan 1887–Jan 1892. Total: 5 volumes</p>

On the Japanese side, the holdings on Jacob Meckel are kept at the Archive of the Ministry of Defense, which makes its holdings available in digital form via the National Archives of Japan. Thirty-two file units bearing reference to him can be accessed by entering the search term “Meckel” into JACAR.

For the period before 1914, research also dealt with German policy on the Far East and its influences on Japan and the Boxer War as a “colonial war in China” in 1900/1901.¹⁴

Regarding World War I, the military confrontation over Qingdao and the protectorate (Japanese-German War) from August to November 1914 only played a minor role in Japanese-German relations compared to the treatment of German prisoners of war who went to Japan as a consequence of that war and were imprisoned there until 1920. The files on the German prisoners of war are distributed over the aforementioned institutes and the Archive of the Japanese Foreign Ministry:

¹⁴ Wippich, Rolf-Harald: Japan und die deutsche Fernostpolitik 1894 – 1898. Vom Ausbruch d. Chines.-Japan. Krieges bis zur Besetzung d. Kiautschou-Bucht, Stuttgart 1987; Leutner, Mechthild, Mühlhahn, Klaus (eds.): Kolonialkrieg in China. Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900-1901, Berlin 2007.

PAAA (PAFO)
Military Division of the Federal Archives
Archive of the Japanese Ministry of Defense
Archive of the Japanese Foreign Ministry

There are other collections in both Japan and Germany that can be considered, but their nature does not allow them to be counted among archival holdings:

German Institute for Japanese Studies (Tokyo)	ドイツ日本研究所
The Naruto German House, Japan	ドイツ館
German Historical Museum, Berlin	ドイツ歴史博物館

At this point, I would like to compare the structural conditions of the archival landscape in Japan and Germany.

In both countries, the holdings mentioned are kept in public archives, i.e. the archives mentioned are publicly administered.

There are 103 public archives in present-day Japan; with the exception of the archives of the Imperial Household founded in 1869, they are all products of the post-war period:

Archive	Number	Year of Foundation
National Archives	1	1971
Court Archive	1	1869
Literary Archive	1	1951
Archive of the Japanese Foreign Ministry	1	1971
Archive of the Japanese Ministry of Defense	1	2001
Prefectural archives	40	Since 1959
City archives	11	1977–2014
Municipal archives	34	1967–2018
University archives	12	1963–2016
Archive of the Bank of Japan	1	1982
Total	103	

The archives were founded in the post-war period because the end of the war in 1945 and the end of the period of occupation in 1952 made it necessary for Japan

to archive official written material that had previously been kept at the authorities' record offices. A start was made at the prefectural level, with Yamaguchi founding a prefectural archive in 1959. This was followed at the national level by the foundation of both the National Archives and the Archive of the Foreign Ministry in 1971. The foundation of the National Archives resulted in the transfer of the file holdings of all the Japanese ministries but the Foreign Ministry, which maintains its own archive to this day, and the Japanese Ministry of Defense established its own archive in 2001. The website of the National Archives is the only medium that can be used to take a joint look at the holdings as long as they continue to be kept separately in different locations. As mentioned before, there is a similarity with Germany where the Federal Archives exist as a national archive while the Foreign Office maintains its own archive, and the records of the Federal Ministry of Defense are transferred to the Military Division of the Federal Archives.

Holdings on military history that are relevant to a joint Japanese-German military history are therefore kept at the national level at the following archives.

In Germany	In Japan
PAAA	Archive of the Japanese Foreign Ministry
Military Division of the Federal Archives (Freiburg i. Br.)	Archive of the Japanese Foreign Ministry
Federal Archives (Lichterfelde-West)	National Archives

The institutes mentioned contain the archival holdings that are kept in accordance with the principle of provenance. This is the crucial difference to the so-called collections concerning German prisoners of war in Japan in the period from 1914 to 1920. Collections at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (Tokyo), The Naruto German House (Naruto), and the German Historical Museum (Berlin) are not holdings that have grown naturally, but the result of a selection of aspects made by the collector or the collecting institute. Nevertheless, these institutes in Japan and Germany perform the archival tasks of assessing, sorting, classifying and preserving cultural assets.

Another difference between the so-called collection assets and archival

material lies in the legal regulations governing the two types of cultural assets. In Japan and Germany, archival material is subject to archival legislation, whereas collection assets are not covered by law unless they are in the possession of archives. The introduction of an archival act in Japan coincided with the first archival act in Germany, the state archival act in Baden-Württemberg of 1987. Although the National Archives in Japan was founded only in 1971, Japan was not late in passing archival legislation in comparison with Germany. As a result, a number of archives were founded in Japan (by 1996: 24 public archives) because the Japanese archival act of 1987 put public archives in Japan on a legal footing. A second wave of foundations can be seen to begin in 2009. This can also be explained with legislation because in 2009, the “Act on public records and their management” came into force (by 2016: another 30 public archives).

In the 1920s and until 1933, the relations between the armies of the two countries played only a minor role, whereas the German Navy sent training ships to Japan:¹⁵

the Hamburg in 1926,
 the Emden in 1927 and 1931,
 the Berlin in 1928,
 the Köln in 1933.

My impression is that military history as well as political, diplomatic and cultural relations in the 1930s, with focus on their development into the 1940s, appear to be very well researched to this day. Bernd Martin, Gerhard Krebs and Theo Sommer, and recently also Hans-Joachim Bieber and most recently Daniel Hedinger are historians working in this field who are worthy of particular mention.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sander-Nagashima, Berthold: *Die deutsch-japanischen Marinebeziehungen 1919 bis 1942*, Hamburg 1998.

¹⁶ Sommer, Theo: *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten. Eine Studie zur diplomatischen Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Tübingen 1962; Bieber, Hans-Joachim: *SS und Samurai. Deutsch-Japanische Kulturbeziehungen 1933-1945* (Monographien, hg. v. Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, Bd. 55), München 2014; Hedinger, Daniel: *Die Achse. Berlin-Rom-Tokyo 1919-1946*, München 2021.

A topic in this context of Japanese-German military relations on which little research has so far been done is the role of Germany in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/1895 and in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905. German military observers were on the ground in both wars, but as far as I know, the holdings at the PAAA and Military Division of the Federal Archives have not yet been analyzed. Their holdings alone for both wars amount to more than 100 volumes of records relating to Germany, or approx. 5 shelf meters of documents.¹⁷

Political Archives of the Foreign Office (PAAA)
1 The Sino-Japanese War over Korea; Duration: 23 July 1894 to September 1916 Total: 64 volumes
2 The War between Russia and Japan; Duration: 01 January 1904 to August 1918 Total: 65 volumes
Military Division of the Federal Archives (BA-MA)
Grosser Generalstab I. Abteilung, Acta betreffend Japan. Militär (Great General Staff I Division, Files concerning the Japanese military) - Japanese reports Duration: 1903 ff.

Conclusion

Military history relations between Japan and Germany have been researched in many ways, but I hope that with this overview, I have been able to show where research is still needed. I can see possibilities for this with regard to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905. For example, the myth that Japan declared war on the German Empire in 1914 to counteract the so-called triple intervention of 1895, which largely traced back to Germany and led to the return of the Japanese-occupied Liaodong peninsula, still lives on. But it is primarily from the Russo-Japanese War that Germany probably gained new insights for future wars, and they can be expected to be found in the files I have mentioned.

¹⁷ All figures are taken from PAAA.