

MEIJI JAPAN AS SEEN BY A GERMAN MISSIONARY

Carl Munzinger's Book *Die Japaner*

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Die Japaner is a late-nineteenth-century text written by Carl Munzinger (1864–1937), a German missionary and member of the Swiss and German mission society Allgemeiner Evangelisch Protestantischer Missionsverein. Munzinger's account presents a variety of ethnographic observations of the Japanese and their religions. In many ways, Die Japaner is both a product of and a comment on the dynamics that took place in Japan at the time. Munzinger's portrayal of the Japanese is full of preconceptions and misunderstandings. However, Die Japaner is also an important record of early European encounter with Japan. It contains many descriptions that capture the "view of the other" as seen by a European 120 years ago.

THE BUDDHIST folklore tradition features many stories which suggest analogies or metaphors for wider reflection. One of the more well-known of these is the story about "the blind monks and the elephant." In the story, a group of blind monks who have never come across an elephant before tries to conceptualize what the elephant looks like by touching it. Each monk carefully describes what he feels, but, since the monks have never seen an elephant before, they rely on the tactile sensations of their hands. One monk describes the elephant's big ears, another its long nose, a third again its big tusks. One person mentions its tree-like legs and its rough skin, but of course, none of them are able to grasp the whole image of the elephant. Each of them in the end has to rely on the words of the other person.

The story of the blind monks and the elephant in many ways functions as an example of how cross-cultural understanding is formed. The monks, each with their limited understanding, lack the idea of the whole elephant. Based on their own descriptions, they form biased interpretations of the image of an elephant. Just like these blind monks, the number of books that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century in the European journalistic market attempting to characterize Japan, its people, and its religions, can also be said to be biased

interpretations. Attempts in these books to provide readers with ethnographic and anthropologic descriptions were often limited, lacking either knowledge of its subject and/or adopting a biased, often religious, perspective in its depiction of Japan.

Still, these early European interpretations of Japan are interesting because they lead to several important questions. First, how do we approach a different culture and translate what we see into text? What misconceptions might appear in this process? What causes these misconceptions or misinterpretations? Each person is historically and culturally constrained or limited by his or her own tradition and is consciously or unconsciously affected by his or her religious, social, and local environments. When these beliefs come into contact with another culture, they create misunderstandings and prejudice interpretations. Just like the blind monks, who could only understand what they could feel, our understanding of new cultures is often limited by our own biased impressions.

Many of the early cultural interpretations of Japan were “misinterpreting” what they saw by describing only what they wanted to see from a Western cultural bias. An influential contributor to these misinterpretations was Carl Munzinger (1864–1937), a Christian missionary belonging to the German mission society of the Allgemeiner Evangelisch Protestantischer Missionsverein (AEPM, Universal-Evangelical-Protestant Mission Society). In his book *Die Japaner. Wanderungen durch das geistige, soziale und religiöse Leben des japanischen Volkes* (The Japanese: Walks through the Spiritual, Social, and Religious Life of the Japanese People), Munzinger carefully describes some of the changes to the Japanese state, society, and religion that occurred during his five and a half year stay in Meiji Japan. *Die Japaner* is a valuable resource of how nineteenth-century European missionaries applied their religious biases to a rapidly modernizing Japan.

In this essay, I look into Munzinger’s descriptions of Japan and the Japanese people during this important age of transformation. In particular, I focus on the spiritual, social, and religious depictions of the Japanese through the eyes of a German missionary’s own experiences in Meiji Japan. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, German and Japanese scholars have pointed out the biased nature of Munzinger’s writing, emphasizing how his Christian faith often predetermined his conclusions (Mathias-Pauer 1984, 117–8). It is easy to dismiss books such as Munzinger’s by claiming that they are bias or do not understand Japan well. Although his Christian worldview often colored his analysis, Munzinger’s book, I argue, is a detailed account of Japanese social and religious life during the Meiji period and provides us with a clue to how foreigners, especially missionaries, understood their encounter with the Japanese people in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Munzinger and the AEPM

Most of Munzinger's *Die Japaner* has been translated into Japanese under the title *Doitsu senkyōshi no mita Meiji shakai* ドイツ宣教師の見た明治社会 (Meiji society as seen by a German missionary). While this translation includes the first eight chapters, the last four chapters (167 pages) dealing with the actual conditions of the Christian Church in Japan, the development of Christianity in Japan, and the future acceptance and success of Christianity in Japan, has been omitted. As the translator Ikuma Aya 生馬 文 explains in her translator notes, "I think that it is not suitable for this general translation to include these chapters because they contain many aspects which discuss the problems of religious beliefs and the possibility of mission as a whole. Only the first half of the book which discusses Japanese society has been translated" (Munzinger 1987, 204). However, as Munzinger himself writes in the introduction to the original text, a part which has also been omitted from the translation, "this book contains quite detailed writings on the religious life of the Japanese. This is important because I think that it is necessary for our German readers to understand Japanese spiritual culture as a whole in order for the readers to comprehend the actual situation of the Christian mission in Japan" (Munzinger 1898, Introduction).

Carl Munzinger was born in 1864 in Quirnbach in the region of Rheinland Pfalz in western Germany. He originally studied in Munich, Strasburg, Heidelberg, and Berlin before receiving a degree in theology in Speyer in 1889. In 1890, at the age of twenty-six, he was appointed as a missionary for the AEPM and sent to Japan to work with the newly established Japanese Christian community in Hongo Ward, Tokyo. His first years in Tokyo were not easy. His relationship with the first missionary of the AEPM, Swiss missionary Wilfried Spinner, was especially burdensome. Spinner, among others, criticized Munzinger for being "too young" to be a pastor in Tokyo (Hamer 2002, 209). Yet, he endured the critical first year and stayed for a total of five and a half years before returning to Germany in 1895 due to illness. In Germany, he was diagnosed with typhus, making his return to Japan impossible. Instead, he served as a pastor in Saarbrücken until his death in 1937 (Munzinger 1987: 204–6).

Munzinger was dispatched to Japan as the third missionary of the AEPM in 1890. The mission society had been founded six years earlier in 1884 in Weimar and established its first foreign mission stations in China and Japan the following year. Among his main activities in Japan were to undertake pastoral work for the German and Swiss Protestant communities living in Tokyo and Yokohama and establish a Japanese church community. The later, was founded in 1887 and named *Fukyū Fukuin Kyōkai* 普及福音教会. In Tokyo, a theological seminary, Shinkyō Shingakkō 新教神学校, was established in 1889. Its aim was to develop "liberal thinking Japanese" to assist the missionaries in their proselytizing efforts

among the Japanese people (Spinner 1891, 4). With the establishment of the seminary, the AEPM gained a new status among the existing Christian denominations in Japan as being one of only a handful of schools providing theological training to local pastors (Hamer 1998, 108). In 1889, the AEPM also launched the journal *Shinri* 眞理 (Truth), which was the first journal to promote the ideas of liberal theology in the Japanese language. Together with the German missionary Otto Schmiedel and his two Japanese students, Maruyama Michikazu 丸山濃培 and Minami Hajime 三並良, Munzinger worked as a co-editor for the journal throughout his stay in Japan (Munzinger 1898, 279).

Munzinger only stayed in Japan for five and a half years, but, compared to other foreign missionaries who had trouble learning the Japanese language, Munzinger, according to Otto Schmiedel, managed to develop “excellent Japanese language skills” (Schmiedel 1920, 140). This particularly helped his daily pastoral work and made him a popular figure among the Japanese church society members, allowing him to preach in the church, organize study groups, and directly conduct missionary work at the Shinkyō Shingakkō. Munzinger was productive and wrote several works both in German and Japanese. His publication of *Die Japaner* in 1898, however, can be considered his main work. The book, in many ways, is an example of academic attempts during the late Meiji period to define “the Japanese” as “other” in contrast to Europeans. In portraying the Japanese people as “other,” *Die Japaner* provides a list of negative examples against which the positive ideals of Munzinger’s own Christianity could be set. By doing this, books like Munzinger’s *Die Japaner*, I argue, not only played a crucial role in creating some of the early European impressions of Japan and its people, but also helped form a legitimate platform for the proselytization efforts of Christian missions.

Munzinger’s *Die Japaner*

In the first paragraph of the introduction to the German version of *Die Japaner*, Munzinger outlines the purpose of his book as “an attempt to give a whole and comprehensive picture of Japanese spiritual culture and thoroughly investigate the so-called ‘*Yamato damashii*’” (Munzinger 1898, introduction). The phrase “*Yamato damashii*” (the spirit of the Japanese people), although conceptually vague, enjoyed a widespread popularity in the last decade of the nineteenth century both among Japanese academics and so-called foreign experts such as Munzinger (Bernesh 2013, 84–5). It was believed to be a unique spiritual ability inherent only in the Japanese people. In *Die Japaner*, Munzinger defined *Yamato damashii* as “the unique spirit of the Japanese people guiding their moral and ethical behavior” (Munzinger 1898, introduction). In order to gain an under-

standing of the Japanese people, Munzinger argued, one would first have to fully understand the idea of *Yamato damashii*.

Understanding the Japanese spirit was, however, not an easy task. A comparison between Germany and Japan was difficult, because, as Munzinger notes, the differences between them were “simply too great!” For example, in contrast to the European people, “the Japanese moral and intellectual upbringing had for thousands of years ignored the freedom of the individual,” neglecting the distinct development of the individual character, and, thus, “making them incomparable to any ethnic group in Europe” (Munzinger 1898, introduction).

Although Munzinger’s *Die Japaner* presented itself as an objective study of the Japanese people, it was actually a prescriptive account tailored to support a foreordained agenda. This may have been bad scholarship, but it reveals that the real purpose of the book was to lend credence to the AEPM’s goal of spreading Christianity in Japan. Of course, the idea of studying “ethnic characteristics” is no longer an acceptable anthropological method. However, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the study of “ethnic characteristics” was considered a legitimate scientific approach, especially in regard to “newly discovered” people such as the Japanese.

In hindsight, Munzinger’s assessment of the Japanese people comes across as a hyperbolic vestige of European ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, his *Die Japaner* crystallizes how many foreigners thought about their lives among the Japanese in the late nineteenth century. Munzinger’s analysis of the “ethnic characteristics” of the Japanese is based on his own observations and experiences during his missionary activities in Japan. Unlike merchants and other foreign experts, Munzinger, as a missionary and pastor, had the benefit of being in daily contact with Japanese members of the Church, and his background as a teacher of literature, philosophy, and theology allowed him, in his own words, “to understand the deepest roots of the mind and grasp the ways of Japanese thinking” (Munzinger 1898, introduction).

As can be seen from the topics addressed in the book, it was not just another popular travel book about the Japanese people that “sprouted like mushrooms from the earth” in the late nineteenth century (Haas 1907, 107). Rather, Munzinger was careful in his descriptions of the language, family, political, and religious life in Japan. In short, Munzinger was trying to capture the spiritual life as a whole by thoroughly “investigating the hearts of the Japanese people” (Munzinger 1898, introduction).

Munzinger’s Views on Lifestyle and Language in Japan

Munzinger’s portrayal of the Japanese reflects a tension between academic analysis and his own Christian bias regarding religious relations. His position

as a Christian missionary provided him with a foreordained conclusion to his study. Despite the claims in the literature at the time that the Japanese land was a mysterious paradise, Munzinger averred that while “the Japanese land is beautiful, and its soil is fertile, bestowed with gifts completely different from that of Germany,” the inner life of the Japanese was unhealthy and miserable (Munzinger 1898, 2). To underscore this argument, he devotes most of the first chapter of *Die Japaner* to disapproving the living standards of the Japanese people. Firstly, he criticizes the traditional style of houses in Japan by describing them as “matchstick houses” that would either tip over in the next typhoon or catch fire before that. According to Munzinger, these houses were so poorly built that wind would pass through gaps in the walls, making them cold and unhealthy for any European to live in. Second, Munzinger criticized the Japanese diet:

[T]o live in a Japanese style house and eat Japanese food is impossible for the European. Because the Japanese meal lacks everything that we think is necessary in the first place; there is no meat, no bread, no potatoes, no milk, no butter. The Japanese can himself no longer explain why he does not eat any meat, at least not beef and pork, and if he gets a chance to eat a European meal with meat, he does so without hesitation. (Munzinger 1898, 15–6)

Munzinger not only offered interesting ethnological descriptions of Japanese daily habits in the late nineteenth century, but also provided a comparison between the Christian missions in China and Japan at the time. While missionaries in China, he states, were forced to wear traditional clothes in public in order to avoid prejudice and attacks, the situation in Japan was the opposite. In Japan, it was considered to be “embarrassing if the missionary were to dress like the Japanese”; in fact, Munzinger mentions, the educated classes slowly had begun to adopt “our way of clothing” (Munzinger 1987, 27–9). In other words, unlike other Asian countries, it was not so much the “external influences” but rather “inner experiences” that “provide challenges for the missionaries in Japan and make Japan such a difficult place to missionize” (Munzinger 1987, 32–3). As the “essence” of the Japanese spirit was different from that of any European, understanding and approaching the Japanese people remained, according to Munzinger, a difficult task.

Munzinger was a studious man. In the book's first chapter, he tasks himself with the job of understanding Japanese daily behavior, believing that this would ultimately allow him to explain the spirit of the Japanese. To make his argument, he turns to the science of linguistics. This approach was useful because it was authoritative and therefore lent legitimacy to Munzinger's overall argument. It was also useful because the scholarship on phonetics allowed him to describe the Japanese language and make it comparable to his own more “profound”

German language. A considerate amount of attention in *Die Japaner's* first few chapters is given to what Munzinger considers to be a lack of ability among the Japanese people in conceiving and understanding abstract ideas. In a comparison with Europeans, Munzinger for example states:

Europeans are satisfied with the thought alone, but the Japanese are not. Ideas only enter the spirit of the Japanese people through empirical reality, through their eyes and ears, their smell and taste, even their feeling buds. The Japanese thinks with his five senses and his thoughts and ideas are expressed through his language, which again is based directly on his immediate senses. The concrete reality is his immediate reality. (Munzinger 1898, 28)

This racist statement is followed by a discussion in which Munzinger explores various lingual patterns common for the Japanese language. For example, he argues, the intuitive characteristic of the Japanese language can be seen in the many onomatopoeic words, that is, words which contain sounds mimicking or repeating noises observed in nature. Munzinger gives thunder as an example:

[The Japanese] are not inclined to describe the occurrence of thunder. Rather than describing the phenomenon in real words they add the sound thunder makes when it rolls by saying “gorogoro.” The same is the case of the sunbeams when they are flickering in the dew, here again the Japanese describes the tingling sensation when looking at the natural phenomenon by using the sound “pikapika.” (Munzinger 1898, 34)

For Munzinger, these linguistic idiosyncrasies in the Japanese language were proof that the Japanese people, in contrast to the Europeans, lacked the ability to fully understand abstract concepts and expressions. The reason for this, he again specified on the same page, was the lack of capacity to grasp anything not based on “sensory experiences” (Munzinger 1898, 34).

For Munzinger, characteristics such as these, led him to conclude that the Japanese language was outdated and impractical and had no future in a modern world. One reason for this, he claimed, was the inability of the language to explain anthropomorphic descriptions. For example:

Even at the expense of a long detour, the Japanese avoids abstract expressions of thought even if he could express them more clearly. The Japanese, for example, knows that “the teacher teaches” because he sees it every day in class; but he cannot understand that “history teaches us something” because he doesn’t perceive the story inwardly. Instead of, “History teaches us,” he therefore says, “If we examine

history, we learn..." (*rekishi wo shirabemasureba, ... wakarimasu*).
(Munzinger 1898, 35–6)

While the extent to which Munzinger thought through the conventions of the Japanese language is unclear, Munzinger was determined to evaluate the language based on his own preconceptions of its insufficiencies. Later in the same chapter, he again attacked the impracticality of the Japanese language by exploring, what he believed was a lack of negative verbs. According to Munzinger, "the Japanese language has no corresponding word for *nein*," nor does the language have any negative pronouns or adverbs. Terms like *niemand*, *kein*, *nirgends*, etc., he argues, have no Japanese equivalent. In his own words, "ideas such as [*niemand*, *kein* or *nirgends*] are impossible for the perceiving mind. A *niemand*, *nirgends* or *kein* is an absurdity that does not exist, these negations are only possible in thinking that knows how to abstract from things that goes beyond the perception of the eyes" (Munzinger 1898, 52–3).

Munzinger also provides an interpretation of the use of honorifics. He believed that honorifics were historical rather than social determined and that they would disappear as the inner character of the Japanese people changed. "Honorifics," Munzinger claims,

are nothing but "talking courtesies" derived from a strict economic status existing in the old times. As Japan continues its progress towards modernization these various bureaucratic, and apologetic impulses of the Japanese honorifics will disappear as well. (Munzinger 1898, 57–8)

Overall, the characteristics of the Japanese people and their language posed various obstacles to the life and work of missionaries like Carl Munzinger. As long as the Japanese only seemed to accept the reality given to them through their senses and rejected any abstract representations or explanation, it remained difficult to incorporate any Christian teachings and ideas in the minds of Japanese society (Munzinger 1987, 43). The Japanese kanji writing system was seen as a particular obstacle in the goal of uplifting the spiritual life of the Japanese people. While the kanji suited the Japanese sensory intuition by providing a concept based on pictures, the kanji system, according to him, did not have the ability to express the cultures and thoughts of Europe. Put in the words of Munzinger, the Japanese language "blocks the spiritual development of Japan" (Munzinger 1898, 60–1).

Munzinger's analysis of Japanese lifestyle and language were clearly based on the racist categories popular at the time, my aim is not to show the provenance of the conceptual tools Munzinger used to conduct his analysis of the Japanese people, but to show how books such as Munzinger's *Die Japaner* helped formulate the European understanding of the Japanese people in late nineteenth

century, an understanding that was largely based on misinterpretation and lack of cultural understanding and exchange.

On the Japanese Spirit

In the second chapter of *Die Japaner*, Munzinger examines what he considers to be the *Geistesleben* (spiritual life) of the Japanese people. Drawing on Plato's Antipodean theory, Munzinger describes the Japanese as the European "antipode." To him the Japanese are the diametrically opposite of any European. He states: "they [the Japanese] are not only our antipodes exteriorly but also interiorly. Things that for us are self-evident, things we cannot imagine otherwise, things that are that way because they are, are by the Japanese understood completely different" (Munzinger 1898, 62). For example, even in the simplest act, such as putting on clothes, the Japanese differed from Western habits. Munzinger noted with amazement: "When watching a Japanese in gala clothing, one can note with astonishment how he first puts on the long coat, called *kimono*, and then the pants or *hakama* on top" (Munzinger 1898, 62). However, Munzinger's observation of the opposite nature of the Japanese people was not just based on superficial cultural habits. Rather, he insists that the *Geist* of the Japanese was in essence diametrically opposite to that of any Westerner. The *Geist* of the Japanese, he writes,

although immature, still possesses a healthy mind which is sharp and vigorous but only reacts on intuition and naïve feelings. In the realm of abstract thinking, the Japanese still have much to learn. It seems like the channels through which our way of thinking goes does not exist or are at least not yet built in the mind of the Japanese. (Munzinger 1898, 63–4)

An "immature mind," according to Munzinger, is an advantage in some situations, especially when it comes to practical matters. In this case, the Japanese seem to exceed the Europeans: "He [the Japanese] has sharp senses, skillful hands, a quick and sure mind. He is a master in the field of practical reality. He is particularly accomplished within the technical art." For Munzinger, Japan's unprecedented rise to become an industrial country in the early Meiji period was proof of the practical nature of Japanese thinking. Munzinger was impressed by how Japan managed to undergo a technological and industrial transition in just thirty years that had taken the European people hundreds of years. In fact, the Japanese were "now able to compete on equal footing with European powers," and he rightly predicted that "the stream of Western industry, which now pours into the country, will soon start to flow back into the world market" (Munzinger 1898, 78).

These reflections led Munzinger to conclude that the cognitive abilities of the Japanese youth were specifically suited to what he termed “spiritless science.” As he states: “The Japanese students possess a better mechanical memory than us; this is especially noticeable when learning languages. In the head of a Japanese student seems to be stored a vast amount of knowledge. In many ways, he is more diligent than his German counterpart” (Munzinger 1898, 65). Munzinger also collected reports from German professors and diplomats who taught Japanese students at German universities at the time. Although most of these reports believed the Japanese student to be a good, quick, and certain learner, they also agreed that he, in some way or another, lacked creativity. Munzinger concludes that while the Japanese student “is good at working with things provided in reality, he is challenged by the core and essence of things, and asked to create something deep and profound from new, we learn that even though the Japanese possesses a rich treasure of abilities, originality is not one of them” (Munzinger 1987, 65–6).

Interestingly, the idea that Japanese people lack creativity is a myth that still persists today. As *The Economist* mentions in the article “The struggle to create creativity Asia,” from 1997 it is a myth that, to a large degree, has been accepted by the Japanese themselves (*The Economist*, 26 June 1997). However, while the article explains the lack of creativity among Japanese as a product of social education, Munzinger saw it as a consequence of Japan’s cultural development. In Munzinger’s view, new ideas and cultural innovations had throughout the history of Japan been imported from abroad. In the past, Buddhism and Confucianism had come from China and Korea. The same was the case for other important features of Japanese culture: morality, kanji, poetry, music, and painting styles. During Munzinger’s lifetime, Japan was again undergoing a cultural absorption, this time from the West. Industry, science, state reforms, justice system, military, and the educational system were all based on models from the West. According to Munzinger’s analysis, the Japanese people were “not blind imitators, but adopt only foreign ideas that are in harmony with Japanese circumstances.” Still the cultural history of Japan proved to Munzinger that the *Geist* of the Japanese people lacked creativity and was incapable of creating its own unique ideas (Munzinger 1987, 67–8).

Another unique characteristic of the Japanese people, according to Munzinger’s analysis, was their lack of interest in things spiritual. For the missionary Munzinger, this was particularly disappointing, stating he was “disheartened by the Japanese lack of interest in metaphysics and ethical issues. But the Japanese mind is immediately drawn to physical things, and since it is real and concrete things that interests them, it is no wonder that the most popular philosophy here is materialism” (Munzinger 1898, 70–1).

On the Temperament of the Japanese People

Late nineteenth-century descriptions of the cultures and people of Asia tend to emphasize the similarity between the country's natural scenery and its people's cultural character. *Die Japaner* is no exception. According to Munzinger, "The Japanese people are the exact mirror of the soil which carries them. Like the two-faced Roman god Janus, the duality of the country is filled with beauty and horror" (Munzinger 1987, 97). To describe this duality inherent in the Japanese people, Munzinger compared them to the many volcanos recognizable in Japan:

The nature of the volcano is very much similar to the behavior of the Japanese people. From appearance, they are graceful, calm, and harmless, however, inside something is constantly at work, fuming, and eventually it will explode, but nobody knows the time when it will be. The Japanese are similar to the volcanos in their country: unpredictable." (Munzinger 1898, 102)

As a product of his time, Munzinger was not satisfied with superficial analogies (although he refers to them in his text constantly) but aimed at discovering the characteristics of the Japanese people by drawing on the newest sciences of his time: psychology and historical studies.

In his investigation of the psychology of the Japanese people, he assigned them a *Sanguine* characteristic—an always optimistic and positive human being, especially in bad or difficult situations. By using the term *Sanguine*, Munzinger drew on the ancient Greeks who claimed that there existed four cardinal humors with each humor correlating to a particular mental state or temperament (sanguine, melancholy, phlegm or phlegmatic, and choleric). According to Munzinger, "The Japanese is a *Sanguine* through and through. He has all the virtues and all the shortcomings of the sanguine temperament. He absorbs everything, gets quickly enthusiastic, shows great interest in everything but is also superficial, changeable, and fickle" (Munzinger 1898, 102). Furthermore, Munzinger reproduced this portrayal of the Japanese people's alleged erratic character by referring to them as "snake-people" (*Schlangenmenschen*). He noted that "the Japanese people are known as snake-people in the sense that they are excellent acrobats and jugglers, but they are also snake-people in the figurative sense, pliable and malleable, a people lacking a fixed straight backbone" (Munzinger 1898, 103). By referring to the "malleable" or "pliable" nature of the Japanese people Munzinger also put them in contrast to what he considered to be the more honorable nature of a Christian European.

This conceptualization reappears in his historical treatment of the development of the Japanese spirit. According to Munzinger, the negative traits of the Japanese, such as being untruthful, were products of their history (Munzinger

1898, 89). Feudalism in Japan, Munzinger claims, created a social system in which control was concentrated at the top and the lower classes were fearful of the consequences of telling the truth. Although the feudal system no longer dominated Japanese society, it still impacted the habits of the Japanese people. Not surprisingly, Munzinger's cure for these old habits was the embrace of Christianity in Japan. Only by doing so, he believed, would Japan move into the modern age (Munzinger 1987, 91).

Munzinger's comments on the Japanese temperament were by no means universal among German missionaries in Meiji Japan. For example, Otto Schmiedel (1858–1926), a German missionary of the AEPM stationed in Tokyo at the same time as Munzinger, offers a different judgment about the character of the Japanese people in his book *The German People in Japan (Die Deutschen in Japan)*. According to Schmiedel, the Japanese were “honest and sincere people” (Schmiedel 1920, 261). Likewise, Johannes Justus Rein in his book *Japan according to Travels and Studies (Japan nach Reisen und Studien, 1905)* criticizes Munzinger's analysis of the Japanese people by pointing out that it is not easy to conclude whether the Japanese people in fact, as Munzinger argued, were Janus-faced or had a tendency to lie more than any other people in the world (Rein 1905, 547).

Munzinger, however, believed that the impulsive and emotional character of the Japanese people was a product of their history. This conclusion in principle worked well to Munzinger's overall argument. As the nature of the Japanese seemed to be a cultural construct, it could be corrected with the introduction of a new religious culture by which, of course, he means Christianity. Munzinger notes that, throughout Japan's history, encounters with foreign cultures—such as ancient China, the Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century, and the contemporary introduction of Western culture from Protestant countries—had made an immediate impact on Japanese society. Each of these historical turning points “felt like a mighty eruption from a volcano that had previously rested”; they radically changed the social composition of Japan until they “like the volcanic embers, suddenly sank back into themselves and calmed down again” (Munzinger 1898, 123).

To a missionary like Munzinger, the rapid introduction of Western culture accompanying the modernization of Meiji Japan must have been a striking sight. Munzinger criticized the manner and speed in which Western ideas were introduced to Japan and was concerned over how deep these new ideas actually were rooted in Japanese society. Discussing the actual effect of these events, he observed: “As long as it concerns the practical use of things, I believe in the seriousness of the Japanese; beyond that, however, I am highly suspicious, and if the whole modern transformation of Japan is nothing more than a machine-like transmogrification without any soul I am worried and disgusted by these

changes” (Munzinger 1898, 128). A less bombastic but similar criticism can also be found in the writings of the Prussian, and later German, diplomat Max von Brandt (1835–1920). In his essay “The Developments of Japan” (Die Entwicklung Japans) from 1903, von Brandt similarly describes the modernization of Japan after the Meiji Restoration as purely external: “It is nothing else, the essence of Japanese culture has not changed” (Brandt 1903, 92–3).

Munzinger extended his criticism of the lack of internal character the Japanese people to their behavior towards others. According to Munzinger, the Japanese people had a hard time caring about people other than their family, and, while they often would express their gratitude in a conversation with others, this was not necessarily sincere. Rather, appreciation was limited to formal ceremonial greetings, often lacking any depths and sincerity: “His gratitude is a formal gesture, not so much a matter of the heart, and the common expression for ‘thank you’ (*Rei wo iu*” [礼を言う] or *reigi o hatasu* [礼儀を果たす]) actually means ‘act with courtesy’” (Munzinger 1987, 100). Munzinger’s view differed in this regard from that of his contemporaries. Otto Schmiedel, in contrary to Munzinger, praised his Japanese acquaintances for their faithfulness and gratitude and described them as people who were deeply concerned about their friendships (Schmiedel 1920, 262).

Even as *Die Japaner* portrays the temperament of the Japanese people as crude, it also emphasizes their artificial nature as a product of historical circumstances. At a time when his compatriots were admiring Japan’s rapid industrialization and wondering whether Japan eventually would eclipse the West, Munzinger took a different approach and wrote with trepidation and concern about the inner consequences these changes would have on the Japanese people. He argued that the Japanese ruling class throughout history had shrewdly fabricated a thought system where virtue, cowardness, and weakness were despised, leaving as a consequence a society of emotionally cold people. According to Munzinger, the contemporary Japanese people did “not express any emotions on their faces, he is not afraid of anything, even going to death. He is not showing any sadness on his face in the situation of the death of a close friend. The Japanese does not feel anything. Since long ago, he has learned to hide his emotions behind customary courtesy” (Munzinger 1898, 119).

Family Life and Moral Code

As the objective of Munzinger’s overall work for the AEPM in Japan in some sense was to encourage the Japanese people to “develop a desire for Christianity,” much of his daily work in Tokyo was directed at the effort of converting Japanese people. Changing educational and family practices to foster new forms of subjectivity in Japanese youth was a pillar of the German mission work in Japan.

But it was not feasible for Munzinger and other missionaries to go door-to-door encouraging adult citizens to embrace the one true faith. Instead they aimed at transforming the inner life of the Japanese family. This process demanded a lot of the Japanese Christian members and was not without social cost, as individual members belonging to the German mission would often be forced out of the family. One reason for this, according to Munzinger, was that the Japanese family was not only the basis of Japanese social order but also functioned as the basis of individual moral actions. The Confucian philosophy of *kō* 孝 (the virtue of filial piety) dominated and guided the Japanese family. Converting to Christianity could be interpreted as showing disrespect towards the family and, in the worst cases, could lead to being dispelled from the family.

Munzinger attempted to explain the moral structure of Japanese families to his German readers by comparing it to Western circumstances. First, unlike in the West, marriage was not a matter of matching suitable partners, but whether the marriage was approved by couple's houses. Munzinger points out how a marriage based on love in Meiji Japan was frowned upon. This is because "protecting the honor of the family is bigger and more important than that of individual love" (Munzinger 1898, 129). However, this system also had a negative consequence. As most marriages were not based on love, they, especially among the lower-class families, often ended in a divorce. According to Munzinger, "a quarter of all married couples" in the late nineteenth-century Japan divorced. These numbers, so Munzinger believed, would gradually decrease with the growing influence of Western morality and Christianity in Japan (Munzinger 1898, 135).

Another difference in the family structure to the West was the status of women. Munzinger treated Japan as hopelessly mired in patriarchy more appropriate for a primitive age. Married Japanese women lived a "self-sacrificing life," and their status in society was not "suitable for any civilized country" (Munzinger 1898, 135).

Munzinger's tone in the following passages shifts from that of a mostly disinterested academic observer to that of an impassioned defender of women's rights, especially concerning women's education. He, for example, describes how the low social status of women was the product of an incompetent educational system attached to traditional values that tried to remove the autonomy and individuality of the women:

It [the traditional education system] is an education aiming to teach ideas of gentleness, obedience, purity, tolerance, and calmness by correcting bad traits such as dullness, unsatisfaction, childish love, jealousy, and stupidity of all Japanese women. This form of education, however, means that their field of interest becomes very narrow and

their knowledge becomes very limited. The women have to rely on their husbands and cannot think for themselves or understand any profound problems. I acknowledge that the gentle nature of Japanese women is attractive but a marriage between a Western man and a Japanese woman will never work out. (Munzinger 1898, 139)

Of course, Munzinger's status as a missionary concerned with the ability of Christians to practice their religion played a significant role in his portrayal of Japanese family life and moral code. Munzinger identified the Confucian concept of *kō* as the greatest hindrance to the integration of Christianity in Japan. While the parent-child relationship in Europe was based on what Munzinger termed a "love-love relationship" wherein the parent and child are equal, Japanese children grow up in a "fear-love relationship," especially to their fathers. The "fear-love relationship," he believed, formed the basic theoretical system dictating the structure of the Japanese family: "Just as Christianity teaches us to fear and love God, in the same way, the words of the father, like the laws of religion demands absolute obedience" (Munzinger 1987, 124).

Munzinger did not only have bad things to say about the Japanese family system, he also saw some beneficial traits in it. With its focus on the family rather than the individual, Confucianism had proven an excellent solution to solve the problem of poverty because children not only had an obligation to look after their parents but to help any family member in trouble. Therefore, Munzinger notes that Japan had managed to have fewer beggars and homeless people on the streets even though the country was not as rich as many European countries (Munzinger 1898, 154).

In other words, he argues that the Confucian family systems had major drawbacks in terms of nurturing morality in children. Due to Confucianism's strict "father-child" relationship, once polite children would themselves become equally crude and rough towards their children as adults. This system, Munzinger believed, contributed to a society where relationships between the population were cold and merely materialistic.

Religious Life

As a Christian missionary, Munzinger showed a great interest in exploring the nature of Japan's religions. Munzinger's primary focus was his treatment of Shinto as Japan's indigenous religion. He employed a nationalism/universalism binary which formed the core theme of his analysis. According to Munzinger, Shinto was a benign local tradition that had been co-opted by chauvinistic nationalism. Munzinger was pessimistic about the fate of Shinto in a rapidly industrializing Japan. The essential agrarian Shinto was described as "childish"

and “innocent” because it was centered around “dancing, queuing, boisterous drums and loud noises.” According to Munzinger, such religious praxis was “an indicator of Shinto’s low culture,” because “big noises are low culture.” Due to this sole reason Shinto could not be appreciated on the same level as Christianity (Munzinger 1987, 163).

Munzinger’s treatment of Shinto essentially followed the academic trends of the day in regarding Shinto as Japan’s indigenous religion. He, however, also appealed to evidentiary history when he questioned the claim that Shinto had always been associated with Japanese statecraft or had consistently served as the “national religion” of the Japanese people.

According to Munzinger Shinto was dominated by the legend of the Son of Heaven *Tenshi* 天子 who ascended from the land of the gods to live among humans in order to rule and unify them. However, Munzinger was obviously aware that this historical interpretation portraying Shinto as a timeless native religion was wrong. He refers to the eighteen-century scholar Atsutane Hirata 平田篤胤 (1774–1843) who had rebuilt Shinto, linking it to *kokugaku* 国学 to promote patriotism and political nationalism (Munzinger 1987, 169). Munzinger claimed that Shinto, as Japan’s diffuse indigenous religion, came closest to a national religion in a cultural sense. However, he is careful to distinguish between Shinto as a shared set of cultural values and ritual practices, on the one hand, and periodic attempts to wed Shinto to the authority of the state on the other. In the end, he indicates that Buddhism, with its religious or mental depth and its high degree of moral rule, actually served as the official state religion more than Shinto. Munzinger predicts, “Shintoism may last for centuries in an individual form of superstition, but it is sure to be destroyed as a state religion” (Munzinger 1987, 171).

For the “depth and seriousness,” Munzinger appreciated Buddhism over Shintoism. But he also took a critical view of the Japanese interpretation of Buddhism, which according to Munzinger did not resemble anything akin to the original teaching. Focusing in particular on Jōdoshū, he argues that the instinctive spirit of the Japanese people had deformed Buddhism into a “system of deception” (Munzinger 1987, 176). Ideas such as the rebirth of the soul and the ascetic achievement of nirvana had in Japan been changed into ideas of a heaven dominated by the worship of thousands of wooden and stone figures of Amida Buddha (Munzinger 1987, 176). For Munzinger, this was problematic, because

as long as religious worship is made towards gods and idols made of wood, stone, or iron, religious thought, feeling, and hope will also be a material matter. It is bound to the world and will pass away with time. Human beings cannot reach a sustainable happiness unless their ideas

are rooted in things that are eternal and universal and will not disappear with time. (Munzinger 1987, 186)

Munzinger ultimately describes both Shinto and Buddhism as central parts of Japanese religious life. Common for both, however, was that they did not have a strong “religious” character or discrete identity; he treats both as religions that at one stage in history had made great contributions to the development of Japanese culture, but whose influence had gradually weakened with the modernization of Japan. In this way, Munzinger shared an evolutionary concept of religion that placed his own Christianity as a universal religion above “national ones.” His treatment of both Shinto and Buddhism as “religions of the past” would prove crucial for Munzinger’s argument to “prove that today is the chance for the Christian mission” (Munzinger 1987, 201).

The Religious Character of the Japanese and the Christian Mission

As mentioned in the introduction, the last four chapters of *Die Japaner* were omitted in the Japanese translation. These chapters deal with themes such as the acceptance of Christianity and the development and possibilities of mission in Japan. The content of these four chapters is worth considering, because they are also closely tied to Munzinger’s understanding of Japan and its people. In the following, I focus on two issues central to these four chapters: Munzinger’s take on the relationship between the spiritual and religious character of the Japanese people and the Christian mission, and his verdict on Japanese Christianity.

Munzinger’s suggestion that the methods of the Christian mission should be adjusted according to the specific cultural circumstances of each country and people, was very liberal and radical for its time. In fact, several conservative mission societies back in Germany rejected this notion and mocked this “outrageous proposal” when it was first suggested by the board of the AEPM in 1884. For Munzinger, much of the missionary’s lack of success in Japan could be attributed to the fact that the foreign missionaries did not adjust their mission to the sensitiveness of the Japanese people. According to Munzinger, “the missionaries’ failure can be attributed to the fact that the missionaries have lacked in effort in trying to understand Japanese culture and therefore, without knowing or wanting to do so, has offended the sensitive Japanese” (Munzinger 1898, 305). For example, street sermons, a general method applied by many missions around the world, should not be organized in a similar style as in other mission fields such as India or Africa due to the Japanese focus on politeness and orderly behavior. Instead, emphasis had to be put on founding and running academic schools and education/cultural facilities. Munzinger saw these as suitable

locations for proselytizing efforts, as they allowed the missionaries to be in contact with Japanese people who were willing to learn (Munzinger 1898, 311–2).

The missionaries were increasingly favorable toward facilitating Christian cooperation with Japanese youths, because they assumed that Christians could have a salutary influence on such groups. The influence of German culture at Japanese universities in those days, especially the influence of German language in the field of modern medicine, was not only of great pride for Munzinger but also offered an opportunity for the Christian missionaries in proselytizing Christianity. By teaching German literature to Japanese students, Munzinger believed, his students would take an interest in religion while losing their prejudice against the missionaries. Teaching Western culture was about building up trust:

Many young students no longer see the missionary solely as a teaching machine, but recognize his personality, and even if they do not say it out loud, they admit it to themselves: “The missionary is actually not as bad a man as one would think considering he is a Christian and a foreigner. You can actually trust this man! (Munzinger 1898, 320)

As I began reading *Die Japaner*, my first instinct was to suspiciously read his text as evidence of an orientalist discourse that aimed to legitimize the West’s project of transmitting Christianity to Japan. Of course, there are supercilious attitudes in Munzinger’s texts that demonstrate his view of Christianity’s superiority over other religions and cultures. Although Munzinger was personally invested in the long-term success of Christianity in Japan, the last four chapters reveal that his understanding of the Japanese people was not as black and white as one would assume. Munzinger for example, admired many of his Japanese students. He highly appreciated both the Japanese Christians in general and the pastors of the Christian churches in particular. In fact, as he states, he even “appreciates Japanese believers more than Europeans” (Munzinger 1898, 370). For example, Munzinger was impressed by the Japanese dedication to church worship. “Most Germans,” he stated, “are satisfied by motionlessly reading prayers from the Common Prayers Book. In contrast, most Japanese—in fact all of them—can pray freely without being attached to a manuscript” (Munzinger 1898, 370).

Still, while these examples epitomize a positive relationship between the missionaries and their Japanese Christian members, Munzinger continuously points out the shortcomings of Japanese Christians. One problem, he believed, was that Confucian influence was still deeply rooted in the Japanese spirit. The objective of encouraging the Japanese people “to develop a sense of individuality” suggests that the missionaries wanted Japanese people to completely release themselves from this traditional way of thinking. Changing educational

practices was one way to foster new forms of subjectivity in Japanese youth. But it was not feasible as long as public Christian figures such as Nijima Jō (1843–1890), the founder of Doshisha University, kept emphasizing that the motivation to become Christian was to raise the honor of the Japanese people as a whole (Munzinger 1898, 355–6). Nijima’s mix of Christianity and patriotism, was to Munzinger proof that Confucian beliefs were too tightly connected to the Christian community in Japan. Munzinger sought to distance himself from this appearance of Christianity by promoting a private and individual version of Christianity, because he believed it would provide the best circumstances for Christianity to flourish in Japan long term (Munzinger 1898, 356–8).

Overall, missionaries like Munzinger regularly criticized Japanese Christians for their subservient orientation towards traditional beliefs. Munzinger’s account also suggests that some missionaries quickly learned that mission work in Japan could not function by merely promoting liberal principles like individuality and freedom of belief within a church. Rather than just criticizing traditional values and making historical critical inquiries into the soul of the Japanese people, Munzinger sought to influence Japanese youth by inviting them to Christian educational facilities. The difference between Japanese Christians and Western Christians was obvious to him:

While Westerners who live in Christian societies and families are content by going to the church on Sundays, the churches in Japan have to replace the role of the Japanese family. Specifically, we have to make the church a place for various gatherings and entertainment, including not only Sunday worship but also bible study groups, schools, and kindergartens. (Munzinger 1898, 364–5)

Conclusion

During Munzinger’s lifetime, Japan changed in dramatic and unprecedented ways. Japan was catching up with the modernization processes that had been introduced through the influx of Western people in the late nineteenth century. As a firsthand witness, Munzinger observed how Japanese society struggled to adjust to the pace of Europe. From Munzinger’s arrival in Japan in 1890, new educational reforms and religious laws changed the institutional structure of the Japanese society. This institutional modernization was also parallel to the modernization of the Japanese language. New semantic structures and technical terminologies continuously affected the development of the society.

After returning back home to Germany, Munzinger published *Die Japaner* in 1898. In many ways, the book was both a product of and a comment on the dynamics taking place in Japan at the time. As a missionary, Munzinger had

set out to understand the minds of the Japanese. He analyzed their language, nature, feelings, family life, politics, and religion and tried to emphasize their uniqueness in comparison to the West. The book summarizes what Munzinger saw and heard during his five years in Japan. It contains a frank analysis of Japanese beliefs and an explanation of why Christianity had such a hard time being established in Japan. But in the end, Munzinger's writings, like so many European books on Japan at that time, were a Western "translation" or "mistranslation" of Japanese culture. Munzinger was "mistranslating" by incorporating only what he wanted to see in the Japanese people and selecting only those things that would benefit and satisfy his German readership. Seen from a Japanese perspective, Munzinger's book is a Western-centered observation full of preconceptions and misunderstandings. It is full of Christian dogmatic prejudice aimed towards the daily life of the Japanese people and their many customs. That being said, there are many descriptions in the book that captures the "view of the other" as it was seen by Europeans at the time. Although it is easy to dismiss many of Munzinger's arguments because of their obvious racism and Christian prejudice, his book introduced an important historical insight into the dramatic changes of Japan as they were seen from the eyes of a German missionary 120 years ago.

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