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Before Aggression: Europeans Prepare the Japanese Army

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of the crusades might help to guide us away from falling into the same pitfalls that Christians did in the past.

WILLIAM MALLEY

BEFORE AGGRESSION: Europeans Prepare the Japanese Army. By Ernst L. Presseisen. Tucson, Ariz.: The University of Arizona Press, 1965. viii, 163 pages.

Much has been written about the antiwar nature of the Constitution of Japan. Whether this pacifist nature is a bare fact or a mask covering Japan's militarism—resurgent or inherent—has brought the radical Japanese youth to the streets to defend one or the other side. It is a question easier to discuss heatedly than conclusively.

That the Japanese were militaristic in the first decades of the present century is a conclusion that invites less disagreement, the difference lying only on the definition of terms such as militarism, fascism, or Japanism. But that the Japanese army was trained by the French and the Germans before Japan launched her aggressive wars is far from being a subject of discussion simply because it is not generally known. And much less acknowledged is that the French had an influence deeper than the Germans had over the Japanese army. *Before Aggression* traces the development of the Japanese army from the feudal *shogun's* army to the sophisticated westernized army of Japan under the tutorship first of the French advisers, later of the Germans. The negotiations behind the agreements to train the Japanese army were almost always beset by the clash between Japanese interests and the rival ulterior motives of France and Germany. The same factors surround what is now called "technical assistance" agreement between the present-day powers such as the United States and the Soviet Union and the recipient nations such as Israel, Egypt, and Vietnam. Here lies the relevance of this book.

Although largely historical, the book will not be out of place among studies in the behavioral sciences. Documents are heavily used, but the neat selection and organization of figures and memoirs make up for its tiresome detailed narration. The focus is on the Japanese policy-makers, the British, French, and German diplomats in Japan, and the foreign military advisers. The scope of the study, which is the changes in the military organization and the policies of Japan vis-à-vis the military, has made this elitist approach not only convenient but inevitable.

One whole chapter out of the five that make up the book gives an account of the career of General Meckel, the German adviser most revered by the Japanese, and his military theories and tactics. In addition to this, a generous description of his personality and personal life

is provided. "His round head was quite bald and he wore side whiskers. He knew how to drink and liked drinking . . . and this quality impressed the Japanese" (p. 112).

If the short and selective memory of man would be tolerated, it would appear that the Germans exercised a greater influence on the Japanese army within a decade than the French who tutored the Japanese in two decades and a half. After their first victories in the war against Russia, the Japanese sent letters of gratitude to their revered teacher, General Meckel. The French teachers had been completely forgotten by the Japanese—but not by Ernst Presseisen.

His conclusion:

The French suffered the fate of many pioneers. Although they had been first in helping to build a Japanese army, their efforts were almost forgotten. Yet their achievements seem no less remarkable. It may well be doubted whether the Germans could have succeeded so quickly without the solid basis of French instruction. To the French, therefore, must go the distinction of having been the founders of the modern Japanese army (pp. 136-37).

Among the mistakes that the French advisers committed in Japan was their insistence in teaching the Japanese only the basic things, for their low estimate of the learning ability of the Japanese made them conclude that it would be useless to teach their pupils sophisticated military science. General Meckel was less arrogant. His modern methods captivated the imagination of his students who became more convinced in their suspicion that the French instructions were already outdated. The arrogance of the French caused them to surrender the stage to the Germans who did not treat the Japanese as their inferiors. Technical advisers of today's world powers could bear this in mind, unless they are willing to see their countries suffer the fate of France. The recipient nations, on the other hand, could learn much from the clever diplomacy of Japan which enabled her to learn from her foreign advisers while keeping her pride and independence intact. For this, the book needs careful reading not only by the Japanologists but by policy-makers of any country as well.

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