Opening Address National Museum of Japanese History

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Menkhaus, Chairman, German JSPS Alumni Association

Sept. 30th 2015

Dear Kurushima-sensei,
Dear Fukuoka-sensei,
Distinguished Speakers and Conveners,
Dear Members of the Local Organizing Committee,
Dear Members of the German JSPS Alumni Association,
Dear Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the German JSPS Alumni Association I would like to welcome you to the symposium History of Japanese and German joint scientific endeavors.

When I together with JSPS Alumni Association board member Sabine Ganter-Richter took part in the yearly gathering of the Federation of German Japanese Societies in Duesseldorf in May 2014 the Japanese Ambassador to Germany, his Excellency Nakane Takeshi in is Welcome Address in the premises of the General Consulate of Japan in Duesseldorf mentioned the upcoming opening of the exhibition “Was Deutschland und Japan verbindet – 150 Jahre Freundschaft zwischen Deutschland und Japan” at the National Museum of Japanese History on July 6, 2015. This exhibition had been planned for the year 2011, because this year was marking the 150. anniversary of German Japanese diplomatic relation. It however could not be realized due to the devastating earthquake that hit the northern pacific front of Japan on March 11, 2015.

The Japanese Ambassador also said that it would be nice to frame the exhibition with scientific symposia. The German JSPS Alumni Association, going to celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2015 also with a couple of events in Japan therefore decided to offer a symposia on the History of German Japanese Joint Scientific Endeavors, combining the historical aspect necessary at the National Museum of Japanese History and the science aspect be part of the alumni activities anyway. Fortunately the Ambassador and Prof. Kurushima as head of the museum agreed, so that the symposium could be run as cooperative event of both organizations.

Actually we tried to open the symposium in the time frame of the exhibition, which was going to run from July 7th to September 6th 2015. But this turned out to be impossible given the other prospected events of the alumni association to be held in Japan. So we could only realize it for today, when the exhibition is already gone. But it will reopen soon at Nagasaki, as we just heard from Prof. Kurushima and the exhibition is well documented in the recently published catalogue, that can be bought in the museum shop.

To document how strong the alumni association has grown since its foundation in 1995 and how divers the disciplines of the members are we decided to only feature speakers who are members of the alumni association, except the two speakers who represent the National Museum of Japanese History, Prof. Fukuoka, who is however well versed in things German, and Prof. Hidaka, who is responsible for cataloguing the Siebold collection widely dispersed over the globe.

German studies on Japan originated in the 17th century, when the German physician Engelbert Kaempfer from Lemgo as employee of the Dutch company VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) stayed in Japan for almost three years. In about the same time the Japanese started to study things German with the help of the books provided to them by said company. This means there is a long history of science between the two countries and the vice versa studies are continuing to this day. Actually they are quite brisk recently because Germany and Japan are both economically and technically leading countries on the globe and both features are driven by science.

I am therefore sure that we will have a very interesting symposium. Thanks for your attention.