

SOME REMARKS ON THE HISTORY OF REGIONAL DESCRIPTION AND THE TRADITION OF REGIONALISM IN MODERN JAPAN†

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I

Here I examine an aspect of the history of geographical thought in modern Japan. By the term "modern Japan" I mean, as in many conventional historical writings, the period after the middle of the last century when Japan wholly entered into economic and political contacts with the outer world and began to carry out a reform which concluded with the establishment of the absolutist Meiji regime. In other writings¹ I have already pointed out some origins of modern Japanese geography and analysed their ideological characters, i.e., the theoretical frames of the geographical thought contained in them and their social implications.

As in the European history of social thought, there are some geographical descriptions to be found in the writings of the Japanese enlightenment ideologists of the early Meiji period. In calling these thinkers—among whom may be found Yukichi Fukuzawa for example—enlightenment ideologists it is necessary to make some reservations. They opposed a feudal political and economic system but in the long run they accepted and sometimes willingly supported the tennoist absolutism of modern Japan. They encouraged the people to obtain an education as a means of careerism and translated Western popular books on history and geography, or adapted from them in order to diffuse among Japanese people knowledge of Western countries as models on which to base the goals to be achieved. Some of these writings of the early Meiji period came to be adopted as textbooks or supplementary reading within the frame of compulsory education. So the geographical descriptions of these so-called Meiji enlightenment ideologists were characterized rather by the expounding of the means of the mobilization of the Japanese people towards a national aim, which was the modernization of Japan, to enable her to stand on an equal footing with Western countries²

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¹ Keiichi Takeuchi, "The Origins of Human Geography in Japan", *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. XV, No. 1, 1974. —, "General Remarks on Human Geography during the Past Fifty Years" in Shinzo Kiuchi (ed.), *Geography in Japan* (Special Publication No. 3 of the Association of Japanese Geographers) Tokyo, 1976

² There are many papers and books of discussions on the historical role of the so-called enlightenment thought of Yukichi Fukuzawa. I basically share the opinion of Masaki Hirota in *Fukuzawa Yukichi Kenkyū*, Tokyo, 1977

than by the recognition of the universal humanity and the self-relativization that characterized the majority of European enlightenment thinkers. In geographical writings such as these of the early Meiji period, belief in progress of humanity was expressed, as a due logical consequence, in the frame of a unilinear evolutionism which excluded the possibility of the modernization of a nation other than after the Western model. There were also many environmentalist assertions, sometimes in very naive form asserting, for instance, that it was possible for Japan to become a civilized country because she was located in the Temperate Zone as were Western countries.

The second trend which I have examined in the above-mentioned previous publications was to be found in school geography. It inherited from the writings of the early Meiji enlightenment thinkers both environmentalism and belief in progress. The latter took the form, more and more with the development of national power, of the acknowledgment of Japanese supremacy over other Asian nations. Geography in schools after the mid-Meiji period (towards the end of the last century), under the system which permitted the use of only officially approved textbooks and, later, under the system of the governmental compilation of textbooks, placed more and more emphasis on the glorification of the land and the people of Japan herself, instead of on the demonstration of a model of civilization and modernization. This increasing emphasis on the favourable geographical conditions of Japan, with more or less nationalist or chauvinist undertones, was found not only in the textbooks of school geography, but also in the writings of some post-1890 leaders of opinion such as Shigetaka Shiga.³ The creation of chairs of geography at higher normal schools and universities during the first decades of this century certainly corresponded to an elevation of the status of geography in the school curriculum. Geographical studies now served as material to evoke the sentiment of national self-identification and patriotism. Although the academic geographers who occupied these chairs were not explicitly engaged in this type of nationalist advocacy, with the exception of a certain number of geopoliticians during W.W. II,⁴ their socio-cultural role was to "scientifically" authorize a demagogic environmentalism and the nationalistic mobilization of Japanese culture.

In analysing the history of geographical thought in modern Japan the last but not the least of its aspects are the indigenous tradition of regional description and, in connection with this, the intellectual trends which gave the most attention to the localistic consciousness. From ancient times in Japan as in China there existed a longstanding tradition of geographical descriptions of states or regions (*fudoki* or *chishi*) compiled by rulers in order to obtain sufficient information for their ruling purposes, i.e., necessary information for the purpose of the enactment of political, fiscal or military measures. In the modern state, this kind of geographical description for practical purposes has been replaced by statistics, maps, cadasters and other official documents or reports.⁵ In fact, also in Japan, the governmental project consisting of the compilation of *kokoku-chishi* (literally meaning "regional geography

³ For the geographical writings of Shiga, a detailed bibliographical survey has been recently made by Shokyu Minamoto, "Shigetaka Shiga's Geographical Works—A Bibliographic Survey—" *Library and Information Science*, No. 13, 1975, (Japanese text with English summary)

⁴ I have treated this topic in detail in Keiichi Takeuchi, "Nihon ni okeru 'Geopolitik' to Chirigaku", *Hitotsubashi Ronso*, Vol. LXXII, 1974

⁵ The process of the establishment of the modern register, census and cadaster systems in Japan is examined in detail in Shinji Hosoya, *Meiji-zenki Nihon Keizai Tokei Kaidai Shoshi—Fukoku-kyohei-hen—*, Vol. I Part 1, Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, 1976

of the *tenno* state") according to the traditional style of regional description initiated in 1872, had to be given up after about twenty years⁶ after having achieved little⁷ mainly because it had lost practical and administrative meaning for the Meiji central government. The problem we have to notice for our studies on the history of geographical thought in Japan is that, even though the compilation of the *kokoku-chishi* failed, the compilation and writing of a great number of regional descriptions were continually being carried out, ranging over a variety of regional types from the hamlet, village or town level to the prefecture level.

In most cases, it was the local governments which compiled these descriptions of local history and geography, or contributed moral and financial assistance in the private publication of these kinds of works in the provinces. The writers of these works were mostly local intellectuals, such as school teachers and Buddhist priests, and officers of local governments. Authoritative academicians such as university professors seldom participated in local projects of this kind before W.W.II. The eight-volume compilation of the "History of the City of Osaka", which was commenced in 1905 and finished after eight years, was one of the few exceptions which were achieved under the editorship of university professors. The style of this description followed in general, even after the discontinuance of *kokoku-chishi*, the traditional *fudoki* style of Chinese origin. It was a rather monotonous description of physical features, history, population, industries, etc. The items were in principle enumerative and independent of each other, excluding any causal interpretation of items not to mention environmental explanations. The only exception was an item concerning the "customs and moral trends of the population" which permitted many apparently arbitrary interpretations. However, sometimes they were judgements passed by the Imperial officers—there was no concept of "civil servants" under the Meiji Constitution—on the local people who were considered "subjects of the *tenno*". Terms such as "obedient", "enterprising", "whimsical", etc., were used to qualify the temperament of a population. In these cases, an environmental explanation was often provided; for instance, it was declared that "to cope with the low precipitation, people have had to construct scattered reservoirs for irrigation water with many difficulties, so they are frugal and diligent"; or, "because of repeated natural disasters and calamities such as fire and other forms of social insecurity in the past, the people are used to not letting the morrow's sun rise on their earnings", etc. These interpretations were generally not the inventions of the writer but legends handed down from old times among the people. It is difficult to find here the influences of Western environmentalism or evolutionism.

II

In the Meiji period the works of local history and geography had thus adopted the tradi-

⁶ A series of detailed studies have been made by Ryuziro Isida on the history and the significance for geographical studies of the compilation of *kokoku-chishi*. Of special note is R. Isida, "Kokoku-chishi no Hensan—Sono Kei to Shiso", *Hitotsubashi Daigaku Shakaigaku Kenkyu*, Vol. VIII, 1966

⁷ Most of the materials and manuscripts compiled in this project were later transferred to the Historical Archives of the Imperial University of Tokyo and were destroyed by fire caused by the earthquake in 1923. Only a certain number of local governments later published the original manuscript of *kokoku-chishi*, as in the cases of Hyuga Province (Miyazaki Prefecture), Nagano Prefecture, Musashi Province (Saitama Prefecture), etc.

tional style of description but, as time went by, they came to show a gradual change in the nature and style of description. Here may be posed three problems: (1) The reasons why so many local descriptions have continuously been published. Excluding articles which have appeared in various academic and non-academic journals and also the pamphlets and similar material issued by municipal offices as introductions to or outlines of their territories, we can list up to about 8,000 titles with about 10,500 volumes on local history and local geography published after 1890 down to now.⁸ (2) The changing nature of the publications during the past hundred years and the reasons for these changes. (3) The significance of this great number of works in the intellectual history of modern Japan. These three problems are closely related with each other, so I will examine each problem in all its complexity.

Because of the chorographical abundance, one can easily assume a hypothetical reaction of localist or regionalist consciousness in regards to the strengthening political and cultural centralization of modern Japan.⁹ By localism or regionalism, I refer to the aspirations of the residents of a region within a sovereign nation-state to attain local political autonomy and to preserve and enhance a unique local culture against the centripetal force of political centralization and cultural standardization. These aspirations must stem from the local resident's sense of belonging to his own local community due to a shared ethnic consciousness and historical experience with his fellow-residents.¹⁰ In this sense, the above hypothesis can be only partially confirmed. It is true that, as is usual in the cases of most late-industrialized countries, and also under the external pressure at work in Japan at that time, the socio-economic processes of modern Japan after the Meiji Restoration were instigated at the strong initiative of the central government, and this consistently alienated the provinciality in many aspects. Local administrative systems were reorganized and the competency of local governments was circumscribed within minimum bounds. There certainly existed local cultures and feelings of belongingness to the home province, but this attachment to the home province never took the form of regionalist expression in the true sense. Pride in one's own village, town or province was felt, and given expression to by people, in the contributions of human and economic resources of the village, town or province to the nation-state, the "Great Japanese Empire". In the books of local history and geography published after the beginning of this century, there was an always increasing number of descriptions on the specialized products of the locality concerned in the spatial division of labour in the frame of the national economy, and biographies of prominent figures of local origin, who had, in effect, abandoned their home towns to make careers for them-

⁸ The most complete list of books on the local history and geography of Japan can be found in the appendix of Takamichi Arisaka and Atsushi Fujimoto, *Chihoshi no Kenkyu to Henshu*, Kyoto, 1968, in which 5200 titles are listed. Besides, we can add some titles kept in the Diet Library of Tokyo and titles published during the past ten years.

⁹ This is the position of many authors who appreciate the significance of the compilation of local history. For instance, Noboru Haga, *Chihoshi no Shiso*, Tokyo, 1972. I owe much to this author for his accurate outline on the significance of the works of local history, but I am not as optimistic as he about the chances of finding the regionalist spirit in local history works.

¹⁰ My definition of regionalism is based on that of localism made by Kimitaka Miwa, "Chihoshugi o Ketsurakuseta Nihon Kindai" in Kazuko Tsurumi and Saburo Ichii (ed.), *Shiso no Boken—Shakai to Henka no Atarashii Paradaimu—*, Tokyo, 1974. —, "Toward a Rediscovery of Localism—Can the Yanagita School of Folklore Studies Overcome Japan's Modern Ills?", *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 1976

selves in the areas of the centre. Sometimes the people were proud of even the rapid introduction of Tokyo culture into their locality, which meant the standardization of culture and the extinction of local traditional cultures. These distorted forms of pseudo-regionalism were expression of a centralized system so strong that it was quite capable of enervating regionalism.

It is also necessary to note that the central government, on its own behalf, also encouraged the publication of local histories and geographies by local governments. This was firstly to consolidate the reorganized local administrative system—though this was done rather artificially by the order of the central government; and, secondly, to integrate the people's sentimental attachment to their homeland into the nationalism of the "Great Japanese Empire". For the former purpose, on the one hand the descriptions of local history and geography played the role of transforming fictive administrative units into substantial regions; and on the other hand the imposing volumes themselves of the local history and geography served the local government authorities as kinds of prestige goods, that is, symbols enhancing the importance of their office. The latter ideological manoeuvre had expanded more and more after the beginning of this century with the promotion of the so-called "Movement for Local Improvement" (*chiho-kairyō-undo*). This movement aimed at, besides the relief of rural poverty, the mobilization of the peasant masses towards a nationalist-oriented ideology at the time of the then-emerging Japanese imperialism. The traditional shintoism of the shamanist type was reorganized; a system consisting of one shrine for one village was imposed and the more lubricious divinities and nature cult deities other than the one *genius loci* (*ujigami*) came to be considered objects of superstition. The *genius loci* of the village became, identified with the ancestor-deity of the village community and, at the same time, related to one of the ancestor deities of the *tenno* family. Regarding the establishment of this trinity of ancestor worship, *genius loci* worship and *tennoism* in every corner of Japan, the descriptions of local history and geography fully served as important ideological means to this end. In this way we can understand the reason why in general the chapters on shrines were considered to be serious and indispensable in the local descriptions of Japan.

III

The fundamental feature of the socio-economic process of Japan before W.W.II was the realization of rapid capital accumulation by the sacrifice of the well-being of the majority of the people. The restricted internal market forced Japanese capitalism into a constant search for ways and means towards the expansion of foreign markets for its products. The ideological issues of this process were to turn the people's eye away from their poverty and alienation by the encouragement of a chauvinistic nationalism.

In generalizing the characteristics, and their development, of the abundant local descriptions of modern Japan, perhaps I have too hastily schematized the various aspects concerning the nature and the social background of these works. The characteristics and the conditions for their formations might involve contradictory forces in themselves, which I have to examine now. Two important problems to be examined here as focuses of these contradictory forces are, firstly, the localist or regionalist spirit of the writers of the regional

descriptions and, secondly, the inevitable existence of the substantial elements from which the local color of the regional description was derived and by which people continued to be attached to their homelands.

As I mentioned before, most of the writers of the local histories and geographies published before W.W.II were intellectuals residing in the provinces concerned. Because of their instinctive love for the local people, their writings contained points which constituted an effective accusation of the central establishment, although, in modern Japan, neither federalist nor separatist movements have ever come into being. Especially at the time of the "Movement for Local Improvement" (*chiho-kairyō-undo*) in the early years of this century and in the period of the world economic crisis of the 1930s, the local writers sometimes went beyond governmental provisions, referring to parasitic landlordism and the fiscal burden of military expenditure as true reasons for the poverty of the peasantry and for the malnutrition of local school children.¹¹ It is necessary to notice in this respect, that, on the one hand, the peasant relief disbursed by the government was also in the interests of the landlord class, which was the most influential of the pressure groups; and, on the other hand, that the activists of tennoist militarism and nationalism, or the so-called Japanese fascism, were sensitive to rural poverty and hated the urban wealthy. The naive and genuine localist sentiment expressed in the form of sympathy for the local people, and especially for the peasantry after all became, in this way, absorbed or transformed into the militaristic nationalism.¹² It was a most tragical paradox but, in fact, the poverty-ridden countryside was the cradle of the Japanese fascism and the source of the strongest and most cruel of the soldiers of the Imperial army.

Among bureaucrats and intellectuals who had once been involved in some way or other in governmental agrarian policies fundamentally oriented towards the protection of the peasantry or towards the physiocrat line but in the specific Japanese sense, some became more interested in the local lives or folklore than in policy-making in the frame of the dominant trends of the establishment in prewar Japan. Around these figures, who included such men as Inazo Nitobe, a prominent scholar of agronomy, and Kunio Yanagita, a bureaucrat engaged mainly in agrarian affairs, a number of study groups had been formed after the beginning of this century. Their purpose was local fact-finding or, according to the preferred term of this group "*jikata kenkyū*", i.e., studies of local matters.¹³ These groups amalgamated in 1910 and continued to hold regular study meetings. They were fully conscious of the importance of the traditional way of life and the mental world of Japanese people which the modernization process and the ideological mobilization towards a nationalistic self-identification failed to negate, or at least, succeeded in only partially destroy-

¹¹ For the school teachers, who were often writers or editors of local descriptions, the worsened living conditions of children were a big concern. In one case, a writer who was a retired school principal even concluded that a close relationship existed between the changing colour of the children's urine and the business fluctuations in the rural milieu.

¹² We can find a typical example of the ideologists who followed this trend in Seikyo Gondo who had advocated the autonomy of rural communities opposed to capitalist centralization in *Komin Jichi-hongi*, Tokyo, 1920. Later his reactionary physiocracy exerted a great influence on the ultra-nationalists who participated in the attempt of the unsuccessful coup-d'état in 1932.

¹³ Kunio Yanagita, *Kokyo Shichijū-nen*, Tokyo, 1959 (now in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shū*, 1964, Appendix Vol. III, pp. 187-188) Inazo Nitobe himself did not very often use this term in his writings. The term *jikata* had already been used in the Tokugawa period by politicians and economists of the time. It was used in the sense of the regional society on which their policies were to be imposed. (N. Haga, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72)

ing. They had perhaps a series of paradigms differing from those of orthodox academicians regarding social studies;¹⁴ they first of all made much of the utility of studies in the lives of the people and never avoided value-commitment; they did not attach much importance to the role of the elite class or the intellectuals in the matter of social change within the rural community, and gave importance to the role of common people, or *jomin* according to the terminology of K. Yanagita, in his capacity as main promoter of social change; they believed in the importance of local legends and traditional customs as a guide to national history. K. Yanagita's *Tono monogatari*,¹⁵ first published in 1910, was a collection of legends in the Tono district of Iwate Prefecture, which demonstrated the combined sense of intimacy and awe that the Japanese feel towards their various animistic deities.

Among the group members interested in local studies, which later formed the basis of the studies of the so-called Japanese folklore school, there were certain geographers such as Michitoshi Odauchi and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi who were unquestionably pioneers of modern geography in Japan. But, later on, professors of university geography made little account of such pioneer geographers, interested as the latter were in indigenous local traditions. On the other side of the matter the local study groups themselves had many problematical aspects. The only feature common to these persons was that they were intellectuals of the centre (mostly residing in Tokyo, with some exceptions in Kyoto or Osaka) interested in local studies. Their unifying theme was the search for the elements of tradition that explained Japan's distinctive national character, rather than the advocacy of decentralization or regionalism at political and cultural levels. Their ideological stands were very vague and varied; some could identify their communitarian view on the Japanese village with the tennoist ideology of the state-village-family trinity; some arbitrarily stretched the meaning of "homeland" (*kyodo*) to an extreme, to cover all of the Japanese territories including Manchuria, as did Odauchi,¹⁶ and plunged into the colonialist cultural movement of the 1930s. Perhaps those who yielded the most contributions to the further development of the science were Yanagita and his followers of the folklore school. Their attempt to collect and systematize the vast amount of information available on popular traditions in every province, every town and every village has given their works an enduring quality. In the works of the Japanese folklore school, an emphasis on shared customs and habits replaced the geographical determinism, historical specificity and structural analyses found in the writings of other academic specialists of the centre. The Japanese folklore school has fully recognized the significance of local oral and written documents and appreciated the contributions of provincial intellectuals. These contributions were, however, above all else, contributions to the synthesizing works of the master, Yanagita who, as was the case with other intellectuals of Tokyo, had no sense of belongingness to his native village in Hyogo Prefecture and remained always nationalist, but in his own way.

¹⁴ Kazuko Tsurumi, "Shakai Hendo no Paradaimu—Yanagita Kunio no Shigoto o Jiku to Shite—in K. Tsurumi and S. Ichii (ed.), *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Kunio Yanagita, *The Legends of Tono*, translated, with an introduction, by Ronald A. Morse, Tokyo, 1975

¹⁶ Michitoshi Odauchi, *Nihon Kyodogaku*, Tokyo, 1940. Chapter 3 of this book was dedicated to Manchuria as the new *kyodo*.

IV

Since W.W.II, the local geographies and histories have continued to be published without cease and in increasing number. The social conditions of Japan have changed to a remarkable degree and so have the characters of such publications. Because of the inflated number of university professors coming into being after the reforms in the education system, there is now an always increasing number of academicians taking part in the compilation of works on local history and geography. This certainly has contributed to the levelling-up of the scientific standard of the regional monographs compiled by local administrative authorities; this means the increased value of the publications as prestige goods, but is a matter extraneous to the question of whether these writers have the regionalist spirit in the true sense.

To all outward appearances, the local administration system has changed and, under the new constitution promulgated in 1946, the local government has come to have a more autonomous competence. In order to speak of the regional autonomy, however, it is necessary to examine, besides the institutional aspects, the real processes of political decision-making, the fiscal mechanisms of local and central governments and conditions pertaining to inter-regional income transfers. In fact, in present Japan, it is power and policy at the national level that determine who wins and who loses in the struggle for resources at the periphery. The subsidy to the local government must be an important measure of the spatial reallocation of resources, but what becomes of the communities at the grass-roots thus depends more and more on the linkages between centre and periphery; and it is almost always the centre that ultimately persists in following through with its decisions.

The ideological situation has assuredly undergone radical changes since W.W.II, with the collapse of the tennoist nationalism of Japan. In the process of the reconstruction and redevelopment of postwar Japan, the establishment no longer required the divine inspiration of tennoism as a basis of nationalism; for the very conditions enabling the logic of Japanese capitalism to function, having once been firmly established in the prewar period, were never destroyed even with the defeat in the war. Japan is now become one of the world economic powers and, as far as regionalism was concerned, matters did not change while people could happily regard the increase of economic welfare and the well-being of the local inhabitants of a region in the same light and in accord with the growth of the national economy. In order to see the rise of true regionalism in Japan, it has been necessary to await the occurrence of the setback to the two-decade economic prosperity accompanying the overall increasing centralization after the war. Aggravated socio-economic problems such as environmental pollution, rural exodus and urban congestion, deteriorated financial situations of local governments, etc., clearly demonstrate the necessity for institutions of decision-making at local levels. For these problems are properly the expressions of the fact that the local interests are not necessarily compatible with those of the nation-state as a whole or, in other words, that the growth of the national economy in the terms of the GNP may often be achieved by the aggravation of regional disparities or social injustice in a spatial context. Whether new socio-economic circumstances involving a rising awareness of regionalism will affect the ideology of local studies, which are now conducted mainly by scholars without local roots, or whether the intellectual tradition of regionalism in Japan

has been already so completely exhausted that the social and humane sciences are impotent in resolving regional problems, remains a problem to be examined in the future.

V

Every human group, every local community and every nation has its proper history of the evolution of geographical knowledge and, in the context of intellectual history, its own history of indigenous geographical thought. The establishment of the national school of modern geography has been realized always under some influence or other of Western modern geography. I have examined, in the case of Japan, the problems concerning the articulation of modern geography with the indigenous tradition of geographical thought. Perhaps the Japanese case shows many special aspects in comparison with other non-European countries reflecting the peculiarities of the process of modernization and the formation of national self-identification in Japan.

Here I would like to propose, as a future task of this Commission, to extend the comparative studies of the formation of national schools of geography to non-European countries. Indigenous traditions of geographical thought, evolution of geographical knowledge and its ideological character, must differ very much according to countries of different cultural backgrounds. In the case of Japan, the indigenous geographic traditions had themselves been strongly influenced by Chinese geographical thought. As for the influence of Western geography, in Tokugawa Japan geographical knowledge of the world gained from the reading of European books was monopolized by the Shogunate government with its seclusion policy. Only after the opening of the country to foreign intercourse, especially in the period of the introduction of the modernization policies mentioned above did the influences of Western geography find a certain ideological expression in Japan. Circumstances might greatly differ in countries once dominated by Western colonialism. The institutional establishment of university geography was realized in Japan in a manner that rather broke away from the traditions of indigenous geography and also from the modernization ideology. Efforts of the newly established academic geography were concentrated mainly on the introduction of Western academic geography in an environmentalist context, although before the 1930s there was no university professor of geography who acquired an academic background at university level in this field abroad.¹⁷ The main task of university geography as an institution was the rearing of school teachers, under the strengthening trends toward the nationalism of the "Great Japanese Empire". University geography had little concern with technocracy and business circles before W.W.II and the situation is comparatively unchanged even now. As I have already stated, this by no means implies that Japanese academic geography was able to take a critical stand against colonialism and the racial discrimination of militarist Japan. It had not even properly considered the limits to the validity of some research methods of Western geography in the analyses of the reality of its own non-Western field. These historical circumstances of the national school of geography in Japan should be further analysed also in the light of comparison with the cases in other countries, especially those of the Third World.

¹⁷ The first chairs of geography in universities were occupied by graduates in geology or history at Japanese universities. In the 1930s some young university staff members made specialized studies in geography at universities in the United States, Germany or France for one or two years.