

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: THE INTERWAR GERMAN AND JAPANESE MASS MEDIA IN THE MAKING OF THE AXIS

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Shortly after New Year in January 2009, my dissertation project on interwar German-Japanese relations was entering a critical period. I had just spent sixteen months collecting sources in archives and libraries across Germany, and I was embarking on a year-long research stay in Japan. Although I managed to gather much material in Germany, I could not dispel a sense of anxiety and foreboding about the progress of my work. Somewhat incoherently, I worried on the one hand that I might have missed some major collections, while on the other I fretted over the time I would need to analyze the hoard of files already in my possession. Worse still, the nature of my findings did not quite match my expectations, since I located relatively few documents from official circles but far more in the cultural realm. Yet I was about to venture again into the unknown and repeat the process in another country, with a different language and uncertain prospects. As a Lufthansa airliner sped me from Germany toward Japan, I was relieved to have some quiet time alone to muse over the situation. When I stared out of the window down at the seemingly endless snow-covered vastness of Russia, one question kept swirling in my head, “What could the Japanese and Germans who concocted the Berlin-Tokyo Axis possibly have been thinking?”

By the time the jet touched down in Japan after twelve hours in the air, I had come to conclude that the lengthy journey and the thought process of those who envisioned an alliance straddling eight Soviet-controlled time zones would prove indispensable to explaining the bilateral ties. For even with direct, subsonic passenger flights in the twenty-first century, traveling between the two places can still be a burdensome and expensive affair beyond the reach of most of the population. In the 1920s and 1930s, then, the state of transportation and communication technologies would have prevented all but a few Japanese and Germans from experiencing the other country. Indeed, to traverse the nine-thousand kilometers separating Berlin and Tokyo, travelers in the interwar era would have to spend anywhere from 46 hours (on a test flight in 1938) to 102 hours (on a one-time Zeppelin voyage in 1929) to at least ten days (via the Trans-Siberian Railway)

to two weeks (with Lufthansa) to almost a month (by sea). Given the difficulty, cost, and time required for transcontinental travel, Germans and Japanese mostly knew each other as an idea. This idea, moreover, was molded by those few who enjoyed the privilege to know the other country and populace first-hand and the access to the mass media to propagate their viewpoints. As I deplaned and drew in a breath of the crisp, cold air in Tokyo, I became convinced that in order to understand German-Japanese relations and foreign affairs in general, international history must be treated as cultural and intellectual history as well. Accordingly, my dissertation examines the role of German and Japanese cultural intermediaries as matchmakers in depicting and promoting the other country as a partner for the next war. It presents the case that the area specialists in both Germany and Japan held a near-monopoly in information about the outside world and manipulated the media to replace existing notions of each other with ones extolling war and martial values. Through mutual portrayals of the other as a habitual conqueror, they successfully transformed the idea of the other country into reality by preparing the conceptual grounds for an alliance. In short, they exercised cultural knowledge as power.

An entity as peculiar and of as much world-historical consequence as the Tokyo-Berlin Axis has, of course, attracted scrutiny from researchers. After all, that Germans became German nationalists and Japanese became Japanese militarists is perhaps not entirely surprising, but the dynamics through which some Germans became supporters of Japanese aggression and vice versa do demand an explanation. Ever since Japan and Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, interpretations stressing the commonality of the two nations have been offered to explain the rapprochement — that both were politically authoritarian or fascist, socio-economically backward, or sentimentally given to extremism. Yet scholars have since cast doubt on these descriptions of Germany and Japan and therefore undermined such comparisons. For if likeness alone sufficed to ground an alliance, surely Imperial Germany and Imperial Japan would have qualified as better candidates than racist Nazi Germany and xenophobic militarist Japan. Instead, however, this pair fought each other in World War I.

Therefore my analysis deemphasizes similarities as an explanatory factor and focuses instead on the actual state of bilateral understanding. For despite technological innovations in the 1920s and 1930s,

Japanese and Germans hardly interacted with each other. It made little sense to speak of interwar German-Japanese relations, but only diplomacy, and even that did not amount to much. Long-distance travel priced most of the populations out of ever seeing the other country, so that individuals with the means to know foreign lands personally, namely adventurers, academics, merchants, missionaries, and correspondents, shaped their compatriots' conceptualization of others. For the vast majority of Japanese or Germans, "Germany" or "Japan" materialized less as a place than as words or images seen in newspapers, watched on films, read in books, heard in lectures, discussed in interest clubs, or internalized through language studies. In order to discover what some Germans and Japanese saw in the other as a worthwhile ally, I would need to recapture the mutual imaginations generated by the opinion makers in the public sphere.

To accomplish this task, I divided the dissertation into two halves, on the German ideation of Japan and then vice versa, each with four corresponding chapters. The first half explores the appearances of Japan in German newspapers, motion pictures, nonfiction, and voluntary associations, while the second investigates the depictions of Germany in Japanese dailies, lectures and pamphlets, nonfiction, and language textbooks. The chapters are designed and organized to simulate what I call the step pyramid of knowledge acquisition. That is, the four chapters within each half mimic the intellectual journey that a German or Japanese layperson would have taken to find out more about the other civilization. Together they demonstrate the dominance of some of the area specialists in crafting the image of the other country in every layer of knowledge creation and dissemination. They also illustrate the effectiveness with which German and Japanese commentators promoted the message of bilateral collaboration since the early 1930s in various channels of the mass media, so that they used knowledge as power by wielding words as a sword.

I. Japan in the German Mass Media

To the extent that ordinary Germans crossed paths with any aspect of Japan in their everyday lives, the encounter most likely took place on newsprint. The relaxation of censorship after 1919 grew the ranks of the press available to an overwhelmingly literate people. Even nonsubscribers could access multiple dailies by reading them on boards in public places, in cafes and restaurants, barbershops, and libraries. Moreover, the decentralization of and fissures in Germany

in the 1920s meant that there was a newspaper for readers of almost every locale and belief. Since newspapers reigned as the most basic and widespread source of enlightenment and amusement they would have served as the first stage of the pyramid for Germans curious about Japan. Accordingly, I surveyed six newspapers across the political spectrum to study the portrayals of Japan in the press. For the years between 1919 and 1933, I consulted, from the far left to the far right: *Die Rote Fahne*, *Vorwärts*, *Vossische Zeitung*, *Germania*, *Neue Preußische Kreuz-Zeitung*, and *Völkischer Beobachter*, whose coverage I extended until 1937 to reflect its status as the organ of the Nazi Party and regime.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Japan as a major power made news in Germany in the contexts of international politics or war. All six dailies mentioned Japan when reporting world affairs, indicating that Japan was considered worthy of page space and editorial attention. More surprising, however, was the frequency with which Japan found its way into the newspapers beyond the front page. For example, the sports section regularly featured the exploits of Japanese athletes, who belonged to that tiny subset of the populations with opportunities to travel abroad. In the interwar years Japanese sportsmen traveled several times to Germany for competitions, culminating in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Although these visits did not quite amount to sports diplomacy, they were enthusiastically covered by German newsmen, so much so that the communist and Nazi papers could even agree in welcoming judo masters from Japan.

Besides the sports pages, Japan was also examined in the culture section. German *Feuilletons* periodically carried short stories on or from Japan, as well as travelogues and lighthearted pieces by writers familiar with Japan. Thus the Marxist *Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts* published tales about the Japanese working class, while the conservative *Kreuz-Zeitung* cheered the popularity of German war films in Japan, and the Catholic *Germania* covered the reception of German paintings of Madonna and Child in Japan. In short, readers could habitually see Japan in the press regardless of their ideological leanings.

This is not to say, however, that Japan was discussed apolitically. Far from it, for editors and commentators certainly used Japan as a vehicle to drive home their points. The examples above already showed that the dailies were prone to select topics consistent with their *Weltanschauung*. No surprise, then, that leftist papers dwelled on labor conditions and nationalistic papers trumpeted war movies.

Even the seemingly innocuous theme of sports was subjected to ideological treatment. Specifically, the *Rote Fahne* greeted the Japanese judo masters because they came to Germany to compete with “worker athletes,” while the *Völkischer Beobachter* equated the promotion of judo in Japan with Nazi youth sports regimens.¹

Therefore, when Japan attacked China in 1931, all the newspapers leapt at the opportunity to interpret the news in accordance with their worldviews. The Marxist press decried not only Japanese imperialism but also the League of Nations as an abettor of Japanese fascism, while the centrist papers disapproved of Japan further disrupting the international order. Interestingly, the *Völkischer Beobachter* also ridiculed the League as a bully toward Germany but a coward in the face of real aggression from Japan. Regarding the Sino-Japanese conflict, the Nazi paper assumed a social-Darwinist neutrality — the fittest combatant would survive and rightfully claim the spoils. Just two days after the outbreak of hostilities, it declared: “It is open war as the means to resolve by force the struggle for living space. Japan has seized the opportunity of the particularly helpless situation in which China finds itself ... to establish a firm foothold in China. The ‘Far East’ has once again taught old Europe how wars are waged.”² This Nazi “might is right” outlook departed from the German diplomatic practice in East Asian affairs, which promoted cooperation with China, and foreshadowed the Nazi rapprochement with Japan and the eventual abandonment of China.

Beyond the newsstand, the next level of rendezvous for Germans interested in learning more about Japan occurred in the cinema. Like the press, film was liberated from wartime control in 1919 and thereafter experienced a golden age that saw it grow in variety, number, and sophistication as a mass medium. In fact, the major studio Universum Film-AG (Ufa) began life as a brainchild of the War Ministry in 1917 but went on to produce several innovative projects. Typically, a visit to the movies consisted of three components: a newsreel, a short documentary, and the feature film, usually in that order. Altogether the process of “film watching” involved much more than just watching a film and could consume the better part of an evening. The allure of the silver screen was enhanced by its value, as a ticket cost on average less than a *Reichsmark* for much of the interwar era, well within even the budget of unskilled laborers. Since other forms of amusement like theater, concert, or opera cost decidedly more than movies, increasing numbers of Germans opted to spend spare time and money on film.

1 *Rote Fahne*, October 1, 1932; and, *Völkischer Beobachter*, June 17, 1933.

2 *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 23, 1931.

Japan debuted in German newsreels in the relatively calm of the middle Weimar years. Despite their name newsreels actually reported little timely news, since shows were produced weekly (*Wochenschau*) and breaking stories would long since have been announced in newspaper extras or on radio. Rather, newsreels animated recent events that spectators had already read or heard about elsewhere. As a result, 1920s cinema-goers saw vignettes of Japanese daily life such as religious festivals showcased in newsreels, so much so that Japan made “news” simply for being what Japan was thought to be and doing what Japan was thought to do normally.

The relaxed atmosphere disappeared in the early 1930s as war gripped Japan and China, and German viewers saw footage and heard sounds of fighting. Although Japan launched similar attacks against Shanghai in 1932 and 1937, the incidents were covered differently by the newsreels. Whereas in 1932 the narrator expressed sympathy with Chinese civilians, in 1937 he lauded the Japanese troops. Even camera angles betrayed a bias for Japan — in 1932 the newsreel zoomed in on Chinese victims of air raids, but in 1937 the camera literally sided with the attacker by shooting from the bomber’s point of view as the bomber dropped bombs on faceless masses below.

A short documentary followed the newsreel as the next component of a cinematic program. Like newsreels, documentaries purported to convey facts, but unlike newsreels their information did not always come across as relevant to world affairs. Given the difficulty in shooting new footage abroad, German documentaries in the 1920s usually relied on familiar clichés in depicting Japan, with predictable themes such as rice farming and volcanoes. The turning point once again emerged in the early 1930s, when documentaries shifted from nature scenes to commentary on current events. One film, *Achtung Australien! Achtung Asien!*, directed by Colin Ross, a personal acquaintance of Hitler’s, specifically described and sympathized with the Japanese as a “people without space” — a formulation pregnant with the Nazi worldview.³ Another documentary, *Kampf um die Mandschurei*, went as far as to argue that Japan must wrest control of Manchuria from China for its own future, and this even before Japan attacked China.⁴

Perhaps the most dramatic shift in cinematic portrayals of Japan took place in feature films. Interestingly, aspects of Japan and its people were included in several movies, though, unsurprisingly, these elements relied heavily on existent orientalist stereotypes, so that the Japanese on German screens were merely characters with characteristics

3 *Achtung Australien! Achtung Asien! Das Doppelgesicht des Ostens*, dir. Colin Ross, 35mm, 2503m, Ufa-Kulturabteilung, Berlin, 1930.

4 *Kampf um die Mandschurei: Die Welt der gelben Rasse*, dir. Gustav von Estorff and Johannes Häussler, 35mm, 1502m, Herold-Filmgesellschaft, Berlin, 1931.

rather than persons with personality. In the early interwar years feature films did little beyond remaking musicals or plays. Fritz Lang's drama *Harakiri*, for instance, adopted a plot that closely followed that of *Madama Butterfly*, while the comedy *Das Mädel aus Japan* tweaked but mostly reused the storyline of the musical *The Geisha*.⁵ Toward the late 1920s, the representations of Japan on film replaced flowery geishas with stoic samurai and uniformed soldiers. Although no Japan-themed movie was made in the 1930s to call for collaboration, the Nazi regime mobilized celluloid to solidify the alliance after its onset. In early 1937, the motion picture *Die Tochter des Samurai*, a joint German-Japanese production, was released in both countries.⁶ Just as the bizarre Anti-Comintern Pact resulted from the union of two strange bedfellows, the film too had to tread a fine line between boosting the Axis and honoring both the Aryans and the honorary ones.

After the silver screen, the intercultural encounter between Germans and Japan took place between book covers, especially in nonfiction books, which collectively approximated the extent of German public knowledge about Japan. Certainly, Germans also read fiction on Japan and translated stories, but I excluded these works from consideration in the dissertation because they did not claim to be factual and it would be futile to try to discern how seriously they were taken. Generally speaking, in the 1920s and 1930s German books on contemporary Japan were created by a small group of authors: missionaries, doctoral candidates and scholars, adventurers and travel writers, and commentators on current events.

Immediately after the Great War, German missions played an outsized role in generating knowledge on Japan because both private firms and the government struggled to re-establish a foothold in the country. Churches stood out besides businesses and the state as the only institution with the wherewithal to send groups of Germans to Japan, namely missionaries, and to print books with little regard for worldly gain. Missionaries had the added advantage that they were embedded in their host societies, spoke the native tongue, and socialized with the locals. Church publications accounted for so many of the books in the early 1920s that readers in Germany searching for nonfiction on contemporary Japan would hardly have missed those by the General Protestant Mission Association. The missionaries generally held Japan in very high regard. They marveled at the natural beauty of the land and the hospitality of the people, but more

5 *Harakiri*, dir. Fritz Lang, 35mm, Decla-Film-Ges. Holz & Co., Berlin, 1919; and, *Das Mädel aus Japan*, dir. Toni Attenberger, Bayerische Filmindustrie, Munich, 1919.

6 *Die Tochter des Samurai*, dir. Arnold Fanck, 35mm, 3292m, Dr. Arnold Fanck-Film, Berlin, 1937.

importantly, they uniformly appreciated the strides Japan had made toward becoming a *Kulturstaat*. Although the missionaries were disappointed by their lack of success in converting more Japanese, they also expressed optimism that, as Japan continue to westernize, it would eventually adopt Christianity as a part of modern civilization. That is, compared to other Asian countries, Japan presented the best chance for salvation in the eyes of the missionaries.

As Germany regained a semblance of stability and prosperity in the mid-1920s, more Germans beyond proselytizers could afford to take an interest in Japan, namely academics and especially doctoral candidates. In almost every interwar year after 1922, several books on Japan based on dissertations were published. A few were composed by Japanese finishing their degrees abroad, but most were written by German graduates who went on to pursue careers not only in academia but also in business and government. Broadly speaking, these books focused on the arts and the social sciences, particularly politics and economics. As Japan attracted more attention and notoriety in international affairs in the late 1920s and 1930s, the number of studies on the country also increased. That Japan was chosen as the topic of several dissertations at various universities indicates a sustained interest in Japan within learned circles in Germany. To wit, the doctoral candidates and their advisers deemed Japan a place worth knowing in some depth.

The relative international peace in the 1920s also enabled Germans with means and will to travel to Japan and to share their observations with readers. Correspondingly, the number of travelogues ballooned, peaking in the late 1920s, and a handful of adventurers and pioneers enjoyed celebrity status in Germany. Some of these, such as Colin Ross, Richard Katz, and Kurt Faber, wrote travelogues on East Asia that enjoyed multiple printings. Under the pen of these wanderers, Japan often appeared favorably, especially in contrast to other Asian countries, as an oasis of western civilization and modern amenities in the exotic Orient. Yet despite the overall positive portrayals of Japan in the travelogues, the authors also freely used Japan to deliver political commentaries on conditions in Germany. For instance, Ross, a supporter of Nazism, lamented that in Japan as in Germany the rise of powerful industrial and financial concerns allowed some to control more and more of the economy and to steer public opinion by acquiring newspapers — virtually the same as Nazi accusations against “Jewish capital.”⁷

7 Colin Ross, *Ostasien: China, Mandchurei, Korea, Japan* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemanns Lichtbildanstalt, 1929), 45.

The breakdown of the international order in the early 1930s not only destabilized Germany but also altered the pattern of the publication of nonfiction on Japan. The world economic crisis and the outbreak of war between China and Japan deterred travelers and shrank the number of first-person travelogues but simultaneously made developments in Japan a more urgent topic. Thus, in the early to mid-1930s there arose a wave of books that commented not only on Japan but also on German-Japanese relations. These authors typically had little to no prior experience with Japan, but the radicalization of German politics seemed to have freed imagination in diplomatic alignments as well. Beginning in 1935, several works of nonfiction started to suggest the concrete possibility of collaboration between Berlin and Tokyo in order to guard against the common threat of communism, thereby foreshadowing the Anti-Comintern Pact by more than a year.

Beyond bookstores and libraries, the pyramid for Germans curious about Japan narrowed and steepened drastically. After consulting newspapers, films, and books, they had literally few places left to turn to for more information, so that nonfiction represented the last accessible, authoritative source for knowledge about Japan for the vast majority of Germans. Students could search for classes on Japan, but they would have found the course offerings disappointing. As of 1935, just a year before the onset of the alliance, Germany's twenty-three universities counted only three tenured professorships of Japanology.⁸ Moreover, even finding a venue to study Japanese presented a challenge, since only four schools (Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig, and Bonn) were staffed to provide instruction in the language.⁹ In any case, since only a tiny sliver of the population enjoyed access to higher education, universities were not a venue that effectively shaped popular images of Japan.¹⁰

Under these circumstances, voluntary associations (*Verein*) had the opportunity and latitude to create and disseminate knowledge of Japan in Germany and to facilitate bilateral rapprochement. Particularly in the 1920s, when the Weimar government was preoccupied by crises, private citizens had to assume the responsibility of liaison with Japan, so that international relations might even be considered personal relations. The endeavor to jumpstart bilateral civilian collaboration was championed by an unlikely figure, the chemistry professor and Nobel laureate Fritz Haber. After a well-received tour to Japan, Haber began in 1925 publicly to advocate stronger scholarly and cultural bonds with the country, and to lay the groundwork for

8 Letter from Wilhelm Burmeister to Paul Behncke, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz, R64IV/38, DJG, June 7, 1935. Burmeister headed the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), and Behncke was president of the German-Japanese Society. Hamburg had the first and only *ordentlicher Professor* of Japanology, while Berlin and Leipzig each had an *ausserordentlicher Professor*. For comparison, there were twenty professors of Indology, seven of Sinology, fifteen of Semitology, four of Islamic studies, eight of Egyptology, one of Assyriology, sixteen of Oriental studies, two of East Asian studies (both Sinologists), and one of Near Eastern studies.

9 Letter from Behncke to Minister of Education and Culture Bernhard Rust, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz, R64IV/38, DJG, 12 June 1935. Lecturers in Jena and Frankfurt also taught language courses periodically.

10 In 1931, the year with the highest number of enrollments in the universities, there were 103,912 university students out of Germany's population of roughly 65 million, in Michael Grüttner, *Studenten im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 487.



Fritz Haber, director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Physikalische Chemie und Elektro-Chemie in Berlin Dahlem, ca. 1928. Photo courtesy of the Bundesarchiv (Photo 102-06975).

a new organization to realize this goal. His leadership and ability to attract funding and colleagues culminated in the foundation of the Japan Institute in 1926.

The Japan Institute served as the premier German-Japanese association into the early 1930s, with the goal of supporting Japanese studies in Germany and facilitating academic communication, rather than advancing any foreign-policy agenda. Not all members were content with this apolitical stance, however, so a few likeminded individuals established a splinter group that came to be known as the German-Japanese Society (Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft, DJG) in 1930. Whereas the Japan Institute promoted Japanology, the DJG promoted Japan.

The sea change triggered by the Nazi assumption of power transformed Japan-related

associational activities in Germany. The apolitical Japan Institute found itself unable to navigate a society where suddenly everything was becoming politicized, while the unscrupulous DJG remade itself to cater to the new masters of Germany by dismissing its Jewish members — at the prompting of some Japanese participants in the DJG. Through *Gleichschaltung* the DJG acquired a new leadership that boasted no expertise on Japan but substantial connections with the Nazi regime and party. Thus the vacuum in official German attention toward Japan that had given rise to the Japan Institute in the 1920s enabled the DJG in the 1930s to anoint itself the arbiter of bilateral interactions. With breathtaking speed, the DJG carved out a niche within the Nazi polycratic jungle on all matters German-Japanese by inserting itself in the cultural, academic, military, and political issues dealing with Japan. Remarkably, although the DJG remained a civil, voluntary association with no official standing, its leadership regularly hobnobbed and corresponded with high-ranking members of the armed forces, SS, and Nazi Party. As the DJG aggressively promoted itself, it also raised the profile of Japan in Germany.

Though the politicization of opinions on Japan benefited the DJG and its lobbying effort, the Nazification of Germany also harmed some bonds with Japan. Ironically, people of mixed German and

Japanese parentage — the literal products of bilateral ties — became ensnared in Nazi racial dragnets. People who had always thought of themselves as good German citizens suddenly discovered that they were being dismissed from their jobs, expelled from universities, and forbidden to marry because of their half-Japanese heritage. To its credit, the DJG tried to intercede for these individuals, but there was precious little it could do. They were surprised to discover that the much ballyhooed phrase “honorary Aryans,” uttered by the Führer himself in reference to the Japanese, actually carried no legal weight.



The Nazification of Germany wrought its gravest damage in the production of knowledge about Japan. Just as Japanology was receiving a boost in 1932 with the creation of a chair at the University of Leipzig and the hiring of Hans Ueberschaar, a rising star in the field, the next year saw the departure of Haber and the demise of his handiwork, the Japan Institute. The greatest irony took place in 1937, when Ueberschaar himself was chased out of Germany by the Gestapo. Although he had exceeded all expectations in advancing Japanese studies in Leipzig, he was prosecuted for, but not convicted of, “unnatural fornication between men.” He was fired and fled to Japan, never to return, and the professorship remained unfilled until 1942. Despite real, negative repercussions on German-Japanese exchanges, the persecution of Ueberschaar exposed the fraud of the new German-Japanese alliance and its accompanying propaganda, for the Nazi regime placed dogma before reason and ideology before diplomacy.

Hans Ueberschaar, professor of Japanese language and culture at the University of Leipzig from 1932 to 1937. Photograph courtesy of Universitätsarchiv Leipzig (NO1163-1).

II. Germany in the Japanese Media

Much as in Germany, newspapers were dominant as the most affordable, available, and diverse source of entertainment and enlightenment in interwar Japan. Although newspapers were introduced to Japan only in the 1860s, modern print journalism rapidly achieved the status of a veritable fourth estate and an alternative source of influence besides the state, military, or industry. In fact, by the

twentieth century the Japanese press served not only as an incubator of ideas but also of future statesmen and businessmen, several of whom had worked as newsmen earlier in their lives. Also as in Weimar Germany, Japan after World War I experienced a phase of liberalization and democratization known as Taishō Democracy that further enhanced the reach and influence of the press. The two biggest newspaper groups each boasted a daily circulation of about two million, which generated enough revenue for their parent companies to perform social functions such as raising funds for disaster victims or naval construction. Each also integrated vertically to operate its own telephone and telegraph services, and even an airline to rush news from abroad. Considering the newspapers' impact throughout society and on people's lives beyond informing the public, they would have served as the most basic channel for the initial intercultural encounter between Japanese and Germany.

Accordingly, the second half of my dissertation begins with a survey of five Japanese dailies from the communist left to the nationalistic right: *Akahata*, *Tōkyō Asahi Shinbun*, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *The Japan Times and Mail*, and *Kokumin Shinbun*. During the interwar years and across the ideological spectrum, these newspapers paid close attention to Germany. Headlines and articles covered a range of topics, featuring the Kaiser, elections, scientific breakthroughs, the economy, and culture. Although in light of the Berlin-Tokyo Axis one might be tempted to interpret the detailed coverage on Germany as a predictive sign, this understanding is not supported by the evidence. Instead, similar to the conceptualization of Japan in the German press, the Japanese newspapers saw Germany through ideological lenses. For instance, the conservative paper took comfort in the fact that Wilhelm II escaped war crimes trials after World War I, even though the Kaiserreich had been at war with Japan.¹¹ Moreover, the myopic focus on the Kaiser led many journalists to misread German politics. Thus the newspapers persisted in depicting the Nazi Party as a monarchist movement and believed that Hitler's rise could bring a return of the Kaiser.¹² Meanwhile, in the early 1930s the Marxist paper downplayed the rise of the Nazis as the last gasp of capitalism and celebrated marginal communist electoral gains as signs of an imminent Bolshevik revolution.¹³ Such misinterpretations demonstrate that the strong interest in Germany exhibited by the Japanese press did not necessarily translate into an accurate understanding.

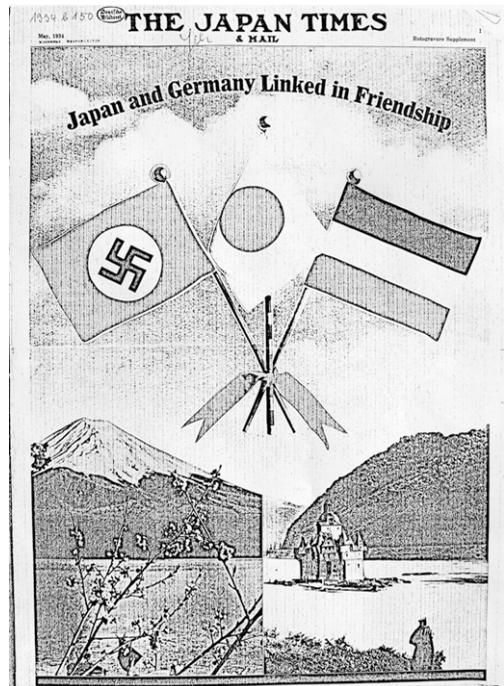
Moreover, although Germany usually appeared as a powerful nation in the newspapers, the Japanese press did not always welcome a

11 *Yomiuri*, January 28, 1920.

12 *Tōkyō Asahi Shinbun*,
November 11, 1923.

13 *Akahata*, November 15, 1932.

revived Germany. While in the 1920s Japanese journalists lavished much attention on the experiments of a Germany under a new government in a new international order, by the early 1930s a strengthening Germany became a matter of concern. Germany's economy was perceived as a competitor for Japan, especially during the difficult times of the world economic crisis. When Hitler assumed power, his regime actually soured relations with Japan. The boorish tactics of the Nazis, including the book burning and persecution of Jewish Germans, turned off a wide swath of editorial opinions. Worse yet, in July 1933 Reich Economics Minister Alfred Hugenberg caused a firestorm in the Japanese press when he argued that in order to meet its reparations obligations Germany should regain control of its former colonies.¹⁴



Yet less than a year later, in May 1934, the government-subsidized *Japan Times* issued a special supplement, “Japan and Germany Linked in Friendship,” to celebrate and encourage bilateral rapprochement. How did the volte-face come to be? First, the Japanese press felt far more threatened by communism than by any Nazi claims for former colonies. Already in 1933, the *Japan Times* opined, “There was a day when political developments in distant lands were of but passing interest to the public of Japan. That such keen interest should be manifested in the recent Nationalist landslide which marked the German elections of March 5 is evidence of the ever increasing interdependence of nations ... Thus, in Japan as in Germany, there are the forces of nationalism on the one hand and on the other those of communism.”¹⁵ Second and more importantly, many of the flash-points between Tokyo and Berlin had subsided. The book burning lasted but a night and the boycott of Jewish businesses only a day. Even the controversy over Germany's the former Pacific colonies disappeared quickly. Hugenberg was sacked by Hitler, and while traditional conservatives continued to speak of the lost colonies, the Nazis were not a traditional bunch. The Third Reich envisioned its imperialistic future in Eastern Europe, not the Far East, thereby neutralizing a major irritant in bilateral relations.

The *Japan Times* Special Supplement, “Japan and Germany Linked in Friendship,” May 1934.

¹⁴ *Kokumin Shinbun*, June 18, 1933.

¹⁵ *The Japan Times and Mail*, March 10, 1933.

Beyond newspapers, the next venue of intercultural encounter between the Japanese and Germany was public lectures and pamphlets. Ideally, the second step on the Japanese pyramid should correspond to the German one, in the form of a discussion of portrayals of Germany in Japanese cinema, but two factors made this an impossible proposition. First, evidence indicates that very few Japanese films featured German themes or characters. To the extent that Japanese moviegoers saw Germany on the silver screen, the film was most likely imported from Germany and thus would not reveal Japanese attitudes toward the country. Second, only a small number of Japanese films from the interwar period still survive today and are not easily accessible. Therefore I chose public lectures and pamphlets as substitute sources comparable to motion pictures because they served similar functions in informing the two populations. A lecture took about the same time to sit through as a film, and the spoken words had an ephemeral quality similar to that of moving images. Lastly, lecture circuits were immensely popular and had a national audience, and the texts of lectures were regularly published and sold as affordable pamphlets.

The portrayals of Germany in lectures and pamphlets in interwar Japan evolved through three stages. The first stage, which was coterminous with the 1920s, saw Japanese commentators on Germany attempting to get reacquainted with the new Germany after 1919. Although scholarly works on modern Japanese-German relations often dismiss World War I as an aberration from a long-term trend toward engagement, for the Japanese at the time the conflict represented a real caesura lasting four years that cut off contact between the two countries. Moreover, Germany had changed so much between 1914 and 1919 that the Japanese observers felt that they needed to re-learn the facts about Germany. As a result, lectures from the first interwar decade were usually delivered by Japanese who visited Germany or Europe for work. Evidently Germany, in spite or perhaps because of the vicissitudes of war and revolution, remained an engrossing topic among the Japanese. Lecturers could and did draw large audiences even if the content constituted little more than one person's impression of Weimar Germany. In this stage, the lectures discussed Germany in a matter-of-fact, businesslike, and rational tone. None of the speakers voiced any hostility toward Germany, the former enemy, and several even showed sympathy for the hardships faced by ordinary Germans. Yet the lecturers also made it clear that they considered Germany primarily responsible for its defeat and predicament after 1919. As Germany managed to stabilize itself in the mid-1920s, the

speakers were also relieved, not because they had any innate or emotional preference for the country, but because Germany's well-being was crucial to the world's and thus Japan's own well-being. A few even gave talks on how Japan might learn from Germany's revival from political and economic chaos, since Japan was also rebuilding from the catastrophic Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.

As the world economic crisis paralyzed politics and policies in Germany and gave an opening to extremists on the left and the right in the early 1930s, the development of Japanese lectures and pamphlets on Germany entered a second stage, in which they exhibited a shift in tone away from neutral observation to partisan advocacy. In other words, whereas the lecturers had previously expressed concern for all of Germany's welfare, now they showed a preference for a certain segment within the country. Specifically, a number of commentators appeared to have been won over by Nazism without the Nazis even attempting to win support in Japan. The person of Hitler became an extremely popular topic among audiences and readers. One speaker who was likely the first Japanese ever to have met Hitler in 1930 even launched a profitable lecture circuit based on that meeting alone. This stage also witnessed the entrance of a number of pamphleteers into the business of commenting on Germany. Usually they had no previous interest in or interactions with the country and appeared to be motivated mostly by profit. In addition, unlike the unemotional tone of the lecturers in the 1920s, these entrants used much more sensational language to promote a populist version of Nazism and to drive up sales of their publications.

In the third and final stage, starting in 1935, the ubiquitous pamphlets and exclusive lectures on Germany began to converge in their advocacy for concrete action to realize a Japanese-German rapprochement. The crucial change took place when influential voices within the political, military, and industrial establishments in Japan seemed to have been reassured about Hitler's intentions. Whereas the more highbrow lectures had used to stick to facts, now they joined the populist and sensationalist pamphlets in calling for bilateral collaboration. In mid-1935, that is, more than a year before the eventual Anti-Comintern Pact, some lectures and pamphlets were already laying out plans for an anti-Soviet alliance. In hindsight, it appears that the government was merely catching up with public discussions on foreign policy.

After lectures and pamphlets, those Japanese still eager to learn more about Germany would have to head to bookstores and libraries to consult topical nonfiction. In addition to books by Japanese writers, the reader was likely to run into numerous works translated from German into Japanese without editorial comments. In the interwar period, Japanese institutions and individuals translated volumes from German with gusto; civil and penal law codes, books on trade practices, and technical manuals were the most sought-after items. Although these works each conveyed little beyond their own specialties, together they made up the central pillar of the transfer of knowledge from Germany to Japan and hence a source for the analysis of Japan's perception of Germany. After all, the selection of works that a people invests the human resources, time, and money to translate from a foreign language says a lot about what it prioritizes as worthwhile from another nation, so that the aggregate of translated works represents an evaluation by one civilization of another. Seen from this perspective, from the 1920s to 1940s Japan esteemed Germany highly, as it imported publications on even rather obscure topics, such as the procedures for transporting corpses by rail and regulations on horse-racing.

In some ways, Japanese books on Germany followed a pattern similar to that of the lectures and pamphlets. Nonfiction works in the 1920s adopted a factual, businesslike tone in their depictions of Germany, while those in the 1930s tended to be more political and activist. Yet important difference separated the books and the pamphlets.

Books did not operate within nearly as thin a profit margin or as tight a publication schedule as pamphlets. The quick turnaround of pamphlets allowed for a response to breaking news, but book authors could utilize the extra time to incorporate in-depth analysis with an extended timeframe. The wider profit and time margins also enabled books to indulge in themes deemed less pressing than those in pamphlets. What is more, book writers presumably felt less pressure than pamphleteers to sensationalize a topic because book readers were expected not only to be sufficiently curious about the content to spend the time to read the books but also to have more education than the consumers of pamphlets. As a result, whereas many pamphlets were decorated with front pages featuring outlandish graphics and slogans to boost sales, most books were designed to be judged not by their covers but by their contents.

The most remarkable feature of Japanese nonfiction on Germany in the 1920s was the air of uncertainty conveyed in the content. The

authors, most of whom had visited Germany before World War I, focused on the many changes brought about by defeat and revolution. Several of them wrote touchingly about their distress in seeing a proud people reduced to panhandling or scavenging for food.¹⁶ Indeed, the Great War loomed so large in the mind of Japanese writers that the word “war” appeared in most books on Germany in the 1920s. Still, although the conditions witnessed by these writers were horrible, they uniformly showed faith that Germany would recover its former glory. While the authors meant well, this sentiment also betrayed a bias for the old order under the Kaiser. This longing for the past colored their distrust of the Weimar Republic, which most writers did not believe to be a viable, stable entity. Moreover, although a few writers appreciated the cultural flowering under Weimar, several also expressed distaste of the freewheeling atmosphere in Berlin’s nightlife.¹⁷

Therefore, when a right-wing movement began to rise in Germany in the early 1930s, some authors were already sentimentally primed to receive the ideology favorably. Yet their welcoming attitude toward Nazism did not necessarily convey a deep understanding of the ideology. In fact, many writers were so misguided by their own memory of Imperial Germany that they mistook Nazism as a monarchist ideology. Like the lecturers, several authors were charmed by the person of Hitler; the first Japanese biography of Hitler appeared as early as September 1931, just a year or so after the initial Nazi electoral breakthrough. It was also quite telling that the first encyclopedic work on Weimar Germany took ten years to emerge, as if writers and publishers alike wanted to be sure that the Republic would not collapse before committing to the project. By contrast, the first such works on Nazi Germany appeared within three years of the regime’s establishment, indicating the confidence the writers had in the dictatorship’s survival. By the mid-1930s, a handful of publishers even emerged to focus exclusively on importing and translating materials from Nazi Germany.

By the time the Japanese climber of the pyramid of knowledge acquisition had consulted the books on various aspects of Germany, the reader would make a rather unsettling discovery. Even if he had exhausted Japanese nonfiction on Germany and German works translated into Japanese, he would only have accessed a minuscule portion of the total corpus of works on Germany, most of which was published in German and therefore inaccessible to Japanese lay

16 For example, Nagura Mon’ichi, *Kyōwakoku Doitsu* (Tokyo: Ōsaka Yagō Shoten, 1922), 159–60.

17 Katayama Masao, *Gendai Doitsu bungakukan* (Tokyo: Bunken Shoin, 1924), Foreword 1.

readers. In other words, to common Japanese the German tongue represented at once the lock and key to a treasure trove of information. In order for non-experts to discover firsthand this wealth and gain self-sufficiency in their quest for knowledge, they would first have to rely on and learn from one last group of cultural intermediaries — Japanese linguists and instructors of the German language.

As a result, language textbooks represented the last stage of the Japanese intellectual encounter with Germany. While even today the Japanese suffer from the stereotype of being poor foreign-language learners, this image belies the strong interest many Japanese, then as now, had in mastering foreign tongues. The apparent lack of success likely had more to do with the quirks of linguistics rather than effort. Since Japanese has no strong ties to other languages, native Japanese speakers find most foreign tongues quite alien. German, of course, would have been no exception. For instance, there are features in German, such as articles, noun declension, and verb conjugation, that are absent in Japanese and would strike Japanese students as unfamiliar concepts. This observation would apply to many European languages, but German presented a unique set of difficulties to the Japanese in the 1920s and 1930s. Even before delving into the niceties of grammar, German would have looked rather difficult to the Japanese. Unlike other Western European languages, German retained the use of blackletter or *Fraktur* well into the twentieth century. Thus, even for those Japanese who had studied French or English, deciphering the letters of German in blackletter would have been difficult. Handwritten German might not have offered any relief either, as German could be penned in either the traditional cursive common to other European languages or the *Sütterlin* style, another feature unique to German. The pronunciation of German, too, came across as odd, as German has a number of sounds unfamiliar to speakers of Japanese.

Yet sources indicate unequivocally that in the interwar era many Japanese studied German, so much so that a cottage industry sprang up to answer the demand for language tools. Why would any Japanese be interested in such a challenging language? As it turned out, mastering German would have brought several tangible advantages. German was a required foreign language for those Japanese studying a range of subjects from philosophy to physics, especially chemistry, medicine, dentistry, and pharmacology. In order to access original research and the latest scientific knowledge from Germany, a number of Japanese resolved to master the language despite its many difficulties.

Since Germany was already perceived as the source of much scientific knowledge, it did not take much of a logical leap for the more politically minded of the linguists to interpret Germany ideologically through lessons on German. For example, one author compared the “round, circuitous” Latin script used by the British to the “formal, earnest” blackletter preferred by the Germans.¹⁸ To others, the sounds of spoken German evoked the image of a virile, rugged, and disciplined people. The clearly demarcated tenses in German seemed to indicate a particularly Germanic, precise understanding of time, while one outdid all others in extrapolation by singling out relative pronouns as a key for the success of not only the Germans but also the whole white race.¹⁹

The transformation of Germany after 1933 caused many Japanese linguists to change the content of their language books. Many writers reasoned that, as a new Germany was being built under Nazism, a new German language was about to be born, and the Japanese would do well to be acquainted with this new language. Thus many of the Japanese linguists voluntarily Nazified the content of their works, without any pressure at all from the German or Japanese government. Beginning in the mid-1930s, Japanese students of German were regularly taught a politicized and Nazified German, so that for homework exercises they would have to translate into Japanese the following sentence, “Democracy again? Who still thinks of it as a spiritual factor today? The era of National Socialism is now marching forth in Germany!”²⁰ Well before the German-Japanese alliance became a reality, a number of Japanese had already undergone self-*Gleichschaltung* and became fluent in Nazi speak.

III. Conclusion

The Berlin-Tokyo Axis, once so intimidating, left no monuments. Today, the only evidence for the Axis materializes as words and images in documents stashed in archives and libraries. In the interwar years up until the Anti-Comintern Pact, to the extent that the populations thought of the other country at all, the two countries interacted with each other as ideas. To be sure, the two nations upheld certain levels of interaction in diplomacy and commerce, but most Japanese and Germans never had the chance to know the other firsthand. Rather, they learned of each other as fine print in newspapers, moving pictures on cinema screens, uttered sounds captured in pamphlets, words and images printed in books, activities conducted in voluntary

18 A. Hahn and Sawai Yōichi, *Seiongaku hon'i Dokubun shinkai* (Tokyo: Nichidoku Shoin, 1924), 63-4.

19 Sekiguchi Tsugio, *Doitsu sūgo daikōza 1* (Tokyo: Gaigo Kenkyūsha, 1935), 261.

20 Takakuwa Sumio, *Teiyō Doitsu shōbunten* (Tokyo: Nanzandō Shoten, 1936), 42.

associations, and vocabulary and grammar memorized in language studies. The German and Japanese governments could do, and did, little to control the appearances of their own nations in the other. Instead, Japanese opinion makers shaped the depictions of Germany in Japan, and German commentators molded the portrayals of Japan in Germany.

The German mass media propagated a static but schizophrenic image of Japan — “a country of juxtaposition” between West and East, familiar and exotic, integration and isolation, etc. The German conceptualization of Japan in the press, the cinema, nonfictions, and interest clubs underwent no great changes. Clichés such as “land of the rising sun,” geisha and samurai, and the homogeneous island nation were applied to describe Japan. These multiple and malleable ideations allowed German opinion makers and eventually the government to highlight aspects of Japan to suit their political needs. Meanwhile, the Japanese mass media reported on Germany selectively, pining nostalgically for the *Kaiserreich*, downplaying the Weimar Republic, and then trumpeting the Third Reich. In all the conduits of information — newspapers, lectures and pamphlets, books, and language texts — Germany was portrayed as a country of science, order, and progress, and the Germans as a people persevering in the face of catastrophes. In contrast to Germany’s unchanging portrait of Japan, Japan’s portrait of Germany followed a narrative of a country spiraling downward in the 1920s and rising in redemption in the 1930s.

Beginning in the early 1930s, independent but simultaneous changes within Japan and Germany prompted a small but vocal clique of Japanese intellectuals, echoed by their German counterparts, to paint an increasingly rosy but distorted portrait of each other’s country. The Japanese pundits substituted the extant notion of a progressive and culturally diverse Germany with one romanticizing its past battlefield heroics, martial ethos, and radical ideologies. Meanwhile, the German commentators replaced the pre-existing stereotype of a quaint, traditional, and geisha-filled Japan with one populated by warriors and glorifying its embrace of political violence, defiance of international order, and offensive war.

The phenomenon of increasingly more militant German-Japanese mutual conceptualizations offers a fascinating example in intercultural intellectual relations. It represents an instance of a population mentally empowering a foreign people to commit violent acts and

gravitating toward such acts, unlike the more conventional case of one believing in the superiority of one's own country. The dissertation argues that the opinion-makers developed the subject of bilateral cooperation and articulated it in politico-military terms. They voiced support for the alliance before it was formed and furnished defense for it afterward. In other words, they helped transform the idea of the other country into diplomatic reality by seeding the public and official consciousness with rhetoric and imagery glamorizing war. Well before the two regimes signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, some German and Japanese commentators had already begun collaborating in joint publications. In short, while the pundits did not control traditional sources of power like the armed forces, bureaucracy, noble lineages, party machines, or great wealth, they wielded their knowledge of the outside world as power and helped transform their fantasy into reality. To wit, they wielded the pen as the sword.

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