

Introduction

In 1934, a Japanese businessman in Osaka hit upon a clever advertising gimmick. He applied to trademark “Hitler” in the Latin alphabet and Japanese kana as a brand name for bicycles and tricycles. The Patent Office publicized his application in early June. Within days, the German Embassy reacted to the taking of the Führer’s name in vain by asking the Japanese Foreign Ministry to intervene. It invoked Japanese laws barring trademarks that infringed personal names or might disrupt public order. It asserted that Chancellor Adolf Hitler had not authorized such use of his name. Moreover, “in Germany the name ‘Hitler’ enjoys a reputation and profound veneration that far exceeds the typical significance attached to the name of a leading statesman. Approving the registration would thus provoke widespread resentment in Germany . . . but also upset Japan’s international relations.”¹ The embassy pressed its case in person the next month and designated its general counsel to follow up.² It reported to Berlin in November that the application had been rejected and the issue resolved.³

This book explores how nationalists in Japan and Germany became mutual admirers in the 1930s. The Hitler bicycle affair is a small but telling illustration of Germany and Japan’s political and cultural entanglements before their entente through the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936. It also exemplifies two major arguments of this book. First, many Japanese shared Germans’ excitement about Hitler. The word Hitler was evidently popular enough in Japan to be considered a marketing ploy. The bicycle maker proposed the trademark not to offend but to claim a valuable brand from fellow Japanese admirers of Hitler. I argue that this admiration is evidence of a “transnational Nazism” that enabled Japanese and Germans to identify with each other and imagine a binational

¹ Bundesarchiv (hereafter: BArch), R 43II/1454, German Embassy’s *note verbale* to Japanese Foreign Ministry, June 12, 1934.

² BArch, R 43II/1454, Herbert von Dirksen to Foreign Office, July 27, 1934.

³ BArch, R 43II/1454, Willy Noebel to Foreign Office, November 21, 1934.

2 Transnational Nazism

community before their governments forged the alliance. Transnational Nazism was an ideological outlook. Its Nazism centered on Hitler's personality and elemental National Socialism as a worldview that combined emphasis on the nation and communal sharing of benefits and sacrifice. This Nazism was transnational because Hitler and his messages resonated with non-Germans on the one hand, and because German Nazis and their movement allowed for the limited accommodation of non-Aryan foreigners, in this case the Japanese, on the other. Transnational Nazism's emergence in both countries was eased by reciprocal cultural appreciation in their media throughout the interwar era.⁴

This last point brings forth the second major argument: words and activities in civil society helped shape German-Japanese mutual perceptions and so promote transnational Nazism. Christening bicycles, a luxury good, "Hitler" was meant to be honorific and convey Hitler's atypical significance; other models included "Hegemon" and "Tokyo Fuji."⁵ But the bicycle maker's clumsy, even if sincere, adulation did not amuse German officialdom. The Third Reich could not countenance any profaning of the "Hitler myth" and touchily defended the Führer's honor, even against an irreverent but harmless commercial appropriation far away.⁶ Yet Germany only had tenuous control of Hitler's image in Japan because Japan also invested words with importance. The embassy had to act indirectly through politely petitioning the foreign ministry and citing domestic laws. In denying the registration, the patent office conceded the violation of an individual's name, but not the transnational disorder that naming rides after the Führer would allegedly spark.

Public discourse and perceptions mattered in interwar Japanese-German relations because few could afford firsthand interactions. To move between the countries, one needed 46 hours on an experimental flight, 102 hours on a zeppelin, 12 days by rail, two weeks via Lufthansa, or one to two months by ship.⁷ A Friedrichshafen to Tokyo ticket on the

⁴ There appears to be only one other use of "transnational Nazism," defined as "a dialogue between Nazism's classic form (Nazi Germany) and its various reformulations." Rebecca Wennberg, "Ideological Incorrectness Beyond 'Political Religion': Discourse on Nazi Ideology among Scandinavian National Socialist Intellectuals" (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015), 159–160. This definition approximates mine in that Japanese commentators attempted to interpret Nazism. But it also differs because German and Japanese Nazis did not debate ideological correctness.

⁵ *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* (hereafter: TA), June 8, 1933.

⁶ Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Rudolph Herzog, *Dead Funny: Humor in Hitler's Germany*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Melville House, 2011).

⁷ Joachim Wachtel, *As Time Flies By: The History of Lufthansa since 1926*, rev. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Lufthansa AG, 2002), 44–47; Deutsche Lufthansa AG Firmenarchiv, "Lufthansa pioneers paved the way to the Far East," 1959.

zeppelin in 1929 cost almost ¥20,000, or 38,000 Reichsmark (RM).⁸ Junior office workers in Japan and Germany earned about ¥70 and 150 RM monthly in the 1930s.⁹ Steamships were more common but their prices were still prohibitive. On the day the zeppelin landed near Tokyo, Norddeutscher Lloyd advertised its 55-day service from Yokohama to Hamburg on the “intermediate class” for around ¥500.¹⁰ Germans could travel to Japan and China, “from time immemorial full of mysteries to us Europeans,” on the tourist class of Canadian Pacific in 1934 for approximately 770 RM.¹¹ Hamburg America Line offered a discount fare of roughly 270 RM for passengers’ “colored domestic help” in 1939; European servants counted as family members and so were charged full prices.¹² The Trans-Siberian Railway, since reopening for international traffic in 1927, was touted by the Soviet travel agency Intourist as “the shortest, most comfortable and cheapest way between Europe and the Far East” with “considerably reduced fares.”¹³ Still, intercontinental rail journeys were expensive. An unpadded cot on an eastbound train in 1935 set one back about 370 RM, a padded berth 590 RM, and a bed 630–870 RM, while the westbound third, second, and first classes cost ¥333, ¥600, and ¥877.¹⁴ The higher westbound fares indicate that demand for traffic from Japan to Europe was heavier than vice versa.

Germans and Japanese could connect through words – handwritten, spoken, or printed – but long distances hampered communications too. Sending a postcard from Japan to Germany via the zeppelin cost ¥2.50 and a letter ¥5.00.¹⁵ Regular international mail cost as little as ¥0.20 but moved only as fast and frequently as surface transportation.¹⁶ Telegraph was typically reserved for exigencies, commerce, or government

⁸ *Yomiuri shinbun* (hereafter: Y), August 22, 1929.

⁹ Obama Toshie, “Shoninkyū shirabe,” *Chūō kōron* 45, no. 7 (1930): 295–301; Landesarchiv Berlin A Rep 001–02/1278, Grundvergütung in Jahres- und Monatssätzen für Angestellte im Alter von mehr als 20 Jahren, June 23, 1938.

¹⁰ *The Japan Times and Mail* (hereafter: JTM), August 19, 1929.

¹¹ *Über Kanada nach Ostasien und Australien: Der neue Expresßdienst mit Riesenschnelldampfern* (Hamburg: Canadian Pacific, 1934), 3, 13–14.

¹² *Überfahrts- und Gepäckbestimmungen: Ostasien, Niederländisch-Indien, Australien* (Hamburg: Hamburg-Amerika-Linie, 1939), 5–6.

¹³ Intourist, *Der transsibirische Express ist der kürzeste, bequemste und billigste Weg zwischen Europa und dem fernen Osten* (Moscow: Wneschtorgisdats, 1935), 6–7; JTM, June 24, 1935.

¹⁴ Westbound ticket prices dropped to ¥313, ¥499, and ¥713 in 1937. *The Japan-Manchoukuo Year Book 1937* (Tokyo: The Japan-Manchoukuo Year Book Co., 1937), front leaf.

¹⁵ TA, August 22, 1929.

¹⁶ Shūkan Asahi, ed., *Nedanshi nenpyō: Meiji Taishō Shōwa* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1988), 26.

business. Technology enabled conversations across continents by 1935, but at a price.¹⁷ To facilitate year-end greetings in 1935 and 1936, the Japanese Communications Ministry cut telephone rates to Europe by half, so the first three minutes of a call to Berlin cost just ¥50.¹⁸ Of course, these stipulations applied only to the privileged few with acquaintances abroad. Those without personal ties had to settle for two-way radio broadcasts, available from late 1933. Audience sizes were limited by radio prices, then about ¥50 in Japan and up to 400 RM in Germany before the Nazi regime introduced the “People’s Receiver” starting at 35 RM.¹⁹ Western classical music permeated the programming because few Japanese and even fewer Germans understood each other’s language.

Space, time, and money made mass media the primary tool with which Japanese and Germans related to each other. Opinion makers with command of foreign knowledge and the means to propagate their views influenced their countrymen’s mutual impressions – the bicycle maker must have been swayed by the Japanese media’s portrayals of Hitler. It may seem doubtful that words could paper over the gulf separating the nations, but such leaps of imagination are actually performed rather blithely. The phrase “German-Japanese” visually and conceptually bridges the two with a hyphen. At once convenient and dangerous because of its power to condense distance, the hyphen can summarize transnational bonds (personal, cultural, ideological, commercial, etc.) but also mask difficulties, ambiguities, contradictions, and transformations in interactions. Tokyo and Berlin were so mindful of public words and perceptions that each put itself first in its version of the “Japanese-German/German-Japanese Agreement against the Communist International.”

As the bicycle maker’s scheme suggests, many Germans and Japanese were already united by their enthusiasm for Hitler before and independently of their governments’ compact. Both states had long guarded diplomacy as a prerogative. But conditions in Taisho Japan and Weimar Germany were especially conducive to the proliferation of public rhetoric and imagery that affected popular views of the world and even foreign relations. Political liberalization, cultural experimentation, and technological innovation in the 1920s and early 1930s created an opening for

¹⁷ JTM, March 1, 1935.

¹⁸ TA, December 12, 1935; TA, December 16, 1936, evening edition (hereafter: EE).

¹⁹ Morinaga Takurō, *Bukka no bunkashi jiten: Meiji Taishō Shōwa Heisei* (Tokyo: Tenbōsha, 2009), 214; Wolfgang Schneider, ed., *Alltag unter Hitler* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2000), 78; Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919–1945, Volume 2: State, Economy and Society 1933–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 192.

civil society to engage in public affairs. Neither in Germany nor Japan could the authoritarian regime of the 1930s shut that door completely. Official neglect of bilateral ties until the Anti-Comintern Pact left latitude for determined individuals and organizations to advance their foreign-policy agendas, maintain contacts abroad, and conduct foreign relations. Whether in the democratic 1920s or the authoritarian 1930s, access to foreign knowledge and mass media was also a tool for international liaisons.

Opinion makers' discourse and activities in both countries reflected and propagated transnational Nazism. In Japan, the media shifted from appreciating Germany to admiring Hitler and his ideology in the early 1930s as the Nazi movement expanded and attained power. Commentators emerged from previous indifference toward Germany, converted from the political left, or radicalized from the traditional right to promote rapprochement with the Third Reich. Before 1933, journalists across the ideological spectrum already obsessed over a rightist Germany and downplayed Weimar's achievements. From 1933, successive newspapers abandoned misgivings about Nazism to lionize the Führer and gravitate toward Germany's viewpoints. Pamphleteers catering to the masses embraced Nazi populism wholeheartedly, while lecturers speaking to the elites found Nazi anticommunism reassuring. Authors and translators imported German knowledge in all fields. As Nazism gained currency, publishers inaugurated a trend in nonfiction about Nazi deeds and in Hitler biographies. And linguists, already overwhelmingly partial to a conservative Germany, increasingly incorporated Nazi-speak in language textbooks from the mid-1930s. The Japanese media succumbed to Hitler and Nazism's appeal much as the Germans did: a galvanized minority acclaimed the Führer; ever more conservatives and centrists joined the approving chorus; and only diminishing leftist outlets remained hostile. The media celebrated Nazi exploits even if they did not benefit Japan. Thrilled by Nazi attacks on liberal democracy, communism, and capitalism, many pundits missed the rhetoric's racist undertones and only superficially grasped the content of National Socialism. Overt Nazi racism was sporadically criticized, deemed inapplicable to Japan, or simply ignored.

In Germany, transnational Nazism took shape as Japan's elevation to a respectable, nuanced, and visible niche within the Nazi worldview and Nazified public sphere. The media affirmed Japan's status as a great power like Germany throughout the interwar era. But in the last Weimar years, domestic polarization began to fuse with external affairs and politicize attitudes toward East Asia: leftists sympathized with China while rightists sided with Japan. At the Nazi regime's outset, the media

replaced a generally apolitical, positive stance toward Japan with ideological partisanship. Formerly fringe voices that heroized Japan and urged collaboration entered the mainstream or semi-officialdom. Before 1933, newspapers of different political leanings covered Japan as a noteworthy nation. From 1933, the Nazi-dominated press cheered Japanese aggression and challenges to the Versailles–Washington system. Interwar German film tended to present a stereotyped vision of Japan. But Third Reich cinema magnified aspects of Japanese culture that aligned with the Nazi glorification of war, martial ethos, and masculinity. Popular and academic nonfiction articulated Japan favorably and described modern traits familiar to Germans. Writers influenced by Nazism selectively highlighted this modernity and old clichés as proof of the two peoples’ shared characters and destinies. And voluntary associations founded to foster civil society bonds mutated under Nazi rule into power-hungry organizations lobbying for Japan and themselves. Nazi media outlets demarcated a position for Japan within their *weltanschauung* by praising its racial purity and admitting its superiority to Germany in certain areas.

Transnational Nazism contributes to several historiographies. The history of German–Japanese convergence deserves and has attracted attention. Ever since the Anti-Comintern Pact, interpreters of the entente have underscored the members’ similarity. Contemporary Japanese and German publicists boasted of common values and struggles.²⁰ Critics branded the two regimes equally cynical and mutually exploitative.²¹ The American wartime documentary *Why We Fight* declared of the Axis: “Although these countries are far apart and different in custom and in language, the same poison made them much alike.”²² Postwar trials, memoirs, and opening of records provided sources for diplomatic histories that remain standards today.²³ Written in the totalitarian theory’s

²⁰ Erin L. Brightwell, “Refracted Axis: Kitayama Jun’yū and Writing a German Japan,” *Japan Forum* 27, no. 4 (2015): 431–453; Danny Orbach, “Japan through SS Eyes: Cultural Dialogue and Instrumentalization of a Wartime Ally,” *Yōroppa kenkyū* 7 (2008): 115–132.

²¹ Freda Utley, “Germany and Japan,” *The Political Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1937): 51–65; Freda Utley, *Japan’s Feet of Clay* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937).

²² *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, dir. Frank Capra, Department of War, 1943; Michaela Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 157–159.

²³ F. C. Jones, *Japan’s New Order in East Asia: Its Rise and Fall, 1937–45* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); Frank Iklé, *German–Japanese Relations, 1936–1940* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956); Ernst L. Presseisen, *Germany and Japan: A Study in Totalitarian Diplomacy, 1933–1941* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958); Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten, 1935–1940: Vom Antikominternpakt zum Dreimächtepakt, eine Studie zur diplomatischen Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962); Haruki Takeshi, *Sangoku Dōmei*

heyday, several such histories describe the two states' diplomacy as similarly authoritarian. Other scholars, often but not only Marxists, argue that both regimes were fascist.²⁴ Since social history's rise in the 1960s, the "latecomer" theory identifies Italy, Germany, and Japan as late modernizing, "have-not" upstarts that jointly assaulted the entrenched empires.²⁵ From the 1970s, neorealists in international relations further reduce differences among nations by treating them as quantitatively defined "like units."²⁶ After new diplomatic history's emergence in the 1980s, researchers have been examining culture's role in Japanese-German rapprochement through public opinion, ideology, and knowledge transfer.²⁷

But narratives that revolve around the diplomatic alliance and attribute it to national commonalities can introduce a hindsight bias and skew our

no hyōka (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin Daigaku Hōgakukai, 1964); Johanna Menzel Meskill, *Hitler and Japan: The Hollow Alliance* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966); Miyake Masaki, *Nichi-Doku-I Sangoku Dōmei no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nansōsha, 1975).

²⁴ Karl Drechsler, *Deutschland-China-Japan, 1933-1939: Das Dilemma der deutschen Fernostpolitik* ([East] Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964); Xunhou Peng, *China in the World Anti-Fascist War* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2005).

²⁵ Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Robert A. Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement in Prewar Japan: The Failure of the First Attempt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 396–397; Peter Weber-Schäfer, "Verspätete Demokratie: Parlamentarismus in Japan und Deutschland," in *Japan und Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Klaus Kracht, Bruno Lewin, and Klaus Müller (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), 137–149; Mark R. Thompson, "Japan's 'German Path' and Pacific Asia's 'Flying Geese,'" *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 5 (2010): 697–715; Akira Kudō, Nobuo Tajima, and Erich Pauer, eds., *Japan and Germany: Two Latecomers on the World Stage, 1890–1945*, 3 vols. (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009). Curiously, the original, Japanese, edition of the last work does not mention "latecomers": see Kudō Akira and Tajima Nobuo, eds., *Nichi-Doku kankeishi 1890–1945*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2008).

²⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁷ Josef Kreiner, ed., *Deutschland-Japan: Historische Kontakte* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1984); Nakano Yoshiyuki, *Doitsujin ga mita Nihon: Doitsujin no Nihonkan keisei ni kansuru shiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sanshūsha, 2005); Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich, eds., *Japanese-German Relations, 1895–1945: War, Diplomacy and Public Opinion* (London: Routledge, 2006); John W. M. Chapman, *Ultrnationalism in German-Japanese Relations, 1930–45: From Wencker to Sasakawa* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2011); Nichi-Doku Kōryūshi Henshū Inkaï, ed., *Nichi-Doku kōryū 150-nen no kiseki* (Tokyo: Yūshōdō Shoten, 2013); Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock, eds., *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Joanne Miyang Cho, Lee Roberts, and Christian W. Spang, eds., *Transnational Encounters between Germany and Japan: Perceptions of Partnership in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Sven Saaler, Akira Kudō, and Nobuo Tajima, eds., *Mutual Perceptions and Images in Japanese-German Relations, 1860–2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

understanding of German-Japanese relations overall. Many works confine their accounts of the entente's origins to the span of the Third Reich's existence.²⁸ The years between the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 and the Tripartite Pact in 1940 enjoy particularly dense coverage.²⁹ The individuals directly responsible for the Anti-Comintern Pact, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Ōshima Hiroshi, and even those marginally involved, the geopolitics theorist Karl Haushofer and the military intelligence chief Wilhelm Canaris, are topics of books.³⁰ In contrast, socio-economic studies take a decades-long view beginning in the late nineteenth century, when Germany's impact on Japanese Westernization was palpable and both powers pursued aggressive imperialism. They then skip to the mid-1930s, when talks and moves toward cooperation intensified.³¹ Whether seen from the short- or long-term perspective, a narrow topical focus on the strategic partnership enhances an appearance of historical inevitability or teleological determinism on the route to joint Japanese-German world domination.

²⁸ Gerhard Krebs and Bernd Martin, eds., *Formierung und Fall der Achse Berlin-Tōkyō* (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1994); Bill Maltarich, *Samurai and Supermen: National Socialist Views of Japan* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Iwamura Masashi, *Senzen Nihonjin no tai Doitsu ishiki* (Tokyo: Keiō Gijyuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005); Till Philip Koltermann, *Der Untergang des Dritten Reiches im Spiegel der deutsch-japanischen Kulturbegegnung 1933–1945* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009); Hans-Joachim Bieber, *SS und Samurai: Deutsch-japanische Kulturbeziehungen 1933–1945* (Munich: Iudicium, 2014).

²⁹ Tokushirō Ōhata, "The Anti-Comintern Pact, 1935–1939," in *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR 1935–1940*, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 1–112; Chihiro Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact, 1939–1940," in Morley, ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy*, 179–258; John P. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis 1931–1938: A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Wolfgang Michalka, "From the Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop's Alternative Concept of Hitler's Foreign Policy Programme," in *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H. W. Koch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 267–284; David Stuart Morris and Robert H. Haigh, "Japan, Italy, Germany and the Anti-Comintern Pact," in *Rethinking Japan, Volume II: Social Sciences, Ideology and Thought*, eds. Adriana Boscaro, Franco Gatti, and Massimo Raveri (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 32–42.

³⁰ Wolfgang Michalka, *Ribbentrop und die deutsche Weltpolitik, 1933–1940: Aussenpolitische Konzeption und Entscheidungsprozesse im Dritten Reich* (Munich: W. Fink, 1980); Carl Boyd, *The Extraordinary Envoy: General Hiroshi Ōshima and Diplomacy in the Third Reich, 1934–1939* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980); Christian W. Spang, *Karl Haushofer und Japan: Die Rezeption seiner geopolitischen Theorien in der deutschen und japanischen Politik* (Munich: Iudicium, 2013); Tajima Nobuo, *Nachizumu Kyokutō senryaku: Nichi-Doku Bōkyō Kyōtei wo meguru chōhōsen* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1997).

³¹ Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1995); Miyake Masaki, *Nichi-Doku seiji gaikōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1996); Mochida Yukio, ed., *Kindai Nihon to Doitsu: Hikaku to kankei no rekishigaku* (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2007).

Transnational Nazism builds on but also departs from the extant scholarship. It devotes full attention to the medium-term interactions between Germany and Japan from the end of World War I through the mid-1930s. Because the two governments did not conduct vigorous bilateral diplomacy or exchange voluminous documents then, the period is usually dismissed as uneventful or tangential. The one exception is analysis of the 1927 commerce treaty based on evidence from its archival record.³² Otherwise, diplomatic and military histories refer only cursorily to the years between the Versailles Treaty and the diplomatic maneuvering that led to the Anti-Comintern Pact. Studies grounded in political-economic structures or the latecomer theory also downplay the 1920s. Interpretations that argue that both states implemented generic fascism or met a “fascist minimum” pay some, but not much more, attention to these years.³³ Weimar and Taisho democracies and internationalisms, however flawed, do not fit well with accounts that highlight long-term authoritarian tendencies. Frank Iklé identified this lacuna in our knowledge in the 1970s:

Weimar diplomacy toward Japan and Japan’s interest in Germany in the 1920s are unknown factors . . . There is need for research on Japan’s interest in a revived Germany and Japan’s attitudes towards Hitler’s *Machtergreifung* [seizure of power] in 1933. Especially important might be an attempt to see what connections, if any, existed between the rise of Nazi ideology in Germany and nascent militarism in Japan, and to what degree, consciously or otherwise, there was some kind of intellectual cross-fertilization.³⁴

Since then, scholars have only partly filled this gap.³⁵ Moreover, some comparative and analytical frameworks have been overturned in the newer literature. Few studies still call mid-1930s Japanese or German policy making totalitarian. Fascism’s historical presence in Japan remains contested. And the latecomer theory’s assumption of a model modernization from which Germany and Japan deviated on their own “special

³² Akira Kudō, *Japanese-German Business Relations: Cooperation and Rivalry in the Inter-War Period* (London: Routledge, 1998).

³³ Joseph P. Sottile, “The Fascist Era: Imperial Japan and the Axis Alliance in Historical Perspective,” in *Japan in the Fascist Era*, ed. E. Bruce Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1–48.

³⁴ Frank W. Iklé, “Japan’s Policies toward Germany,” in *Japan’s Foreign Policy, 1868–1941: A Research Guide*, ed. James W. Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 305–306.

³⁵ Peter Pantzer, “Deutschland und Japan vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zum Austritt aus dem Völkerbund (1914–1933),” in Kreiner, ed., *Deutschland-Japan*, 141–160; Josef Kreiner and Regine Mathias, eds., *Deutschland-Japan in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990).

paths” has been questioned.³⁶ If either nation was not totalitarian, fascist, or late-developing, interpretations hinging on these theories must be revised. Certainly, Tokyo and Berlin had overlapping goals. But they do not account for the mutual esteem and solidarity that arose between Germans and Japanese in the 1930s. Similarities in development did not bring Meiji Japan and Imperial Germany together. Just the opposite. The Kaiserreich reversed Japanese expansion through the Triple Intervention in 1895 and Wilhelm II warned Europe of the “Yellow Peril.” In World War I, Japan conquered Germany’s Asian-Oceanic colonies. Likeness and common interests are not sufficient to explain the rapprochement of Nazi Germany and Showa Japan.

This book argues that a cultural-historical perspective that focuses on the entire interwar era helps make sense of the diplomatic entente. The turn to culture leads the historian to rich, diverse sources created in the relatively liberal, open 1920s and early 1930s. Opinion makers in each country expressed their views in newspapers, pamphlets, lectures, films, books, language textbooks, and interest clubs. These outlets reveal the reciprocal interpretations and ideological adaptations by Japanese and German journalists, speakers, writers, translators, and filmmakers as they encountered information from the other country. *Transnational Nazism* consults these sources to present an ideologically and culturally contextualized history of German-Japanese convergence rather than a narrative focused on short-term power politics or reliant on generalizations of structural similarity. Essentially, for diplomatic history the Anti-Comintern Pact is the cornerstone of the Axis, but for cultural history it is the keystone capping years of ideological resonance and positive mutual depictions.

The case for transnational Nazism’s existence intersects with debates on 1930s Japan’s transition from liberalism to authoritarianism. Adventurism overseas, insurrectionary junior officers, and their suppression by the military establishment subverted parliamentary democracy and pushed Japan rightward even before the onset of full-scale war against China. Researchers concur that from the mid-1930s Japan was militarist. Alfred Vagts’s 1937 definition of “militarism” fits Japan: “a domination of the military man over the civilian, an undue preponderance of military demands, an emphasis on military considerations, spirit, ideals, and

³⁶ Bernd Martin, ed., *Japans Weg in die Moderne: Ein Sonderweg nach deutschem Vorbild?* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987); Wolfgang Streeck and Kozo Yamamura, *The Origins of Nonliberal Capitalism: Germany and Japan in Comparison* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).