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History and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Japan and Germany

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History and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Japan and Germany

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I even believe that all of us suffer from a consuming historical fever and should at least realize that we suffer from it.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

The historical fever of last year has risen this year; newspapers, journals and novels alike end up being unpopular if they do not include a historical interest.

—*Kokumin shinbun*, quoted in
Waseda Bungaku 31, 1893

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|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Why Japan and Germany? | 5. The Beginnings of History as an Autonomous Discipline |
| 2. Historical Scholarship in Germany | 6. Germany as a Model for Japan? |
| 3. History and the Nation in Germany | 7. Conclusion: Japan and Germany in the Twentieth Century |
| 4. Official Historiography in Japan | |

1. WHY JAPAN AND GERMANY?

The link between historical writing and the nation is not unique to Germany and Japan.¹⁾ However, it is particularly obvious in these two countries because there the formation of the nation-state and the emergence of history as a professional academic discipline occurred at the same time. National unification came later to Germany than to the other great European powers; the German empire was founded in 1871, the same year the Meiji government achieved control over the whole of Japan by abolishing the feudal domains and replacing them with prefectures (*haihan chiken*). German historical scholarship achieved a synthesis of text criticism, work with sources, and the concept of the nation as a “unique whole in which spiritual forces bind things together and each element influences the others” [BREISACH 1994: 229], and in so doing provided a model for other European countries and North America. That model was introduced to Japan through the

1) See, for example, Anderson [1991] and Breisach [1994].

person of Ludwig Rieß (1861–1928), who became professor of the new history department at the Imperial University in 1887, and through several Japanese scholars who studied history in Germany and returned to teach it in Japan. History was only one of several areas in which Germany became a model for Japan from the 1880s on; others included the introduction of a parliamentary constitution. The importance of German influence in Japan has been treated elsewhere;²⁾ here it will suffice to say that Japan looked to Germany in response to the challenges it faced as a newly formed nation-state that had to be filled with meaning for its citizens and had to define its position among the powers—challenges Germany was facing at around the same time.³⁾

2. HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN GERMANY

“Sanctus amor patriae dat animum” (Holy love for the fatherland gives soul [to the venture]) was the motto of the Society for the Study of Early German History, established in 1819 with the aim of publishing what subsequently became the great national collection of source material of medieval Germany, the *Monumenta Germaniae historica* (MGH). Perhaps more than any other work it exemplifies the achievements in the collection and publication of sources inspired by rising German nationalism, in the wake of the Wars of Liberation (1813–1815) [CAENEGEM and GANSHOF 1962:180–181].

The name most commonly associated with the formation of the modern discipline of history and with its establishment at university level is that of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). Ranke applied the methods of textual criticism, in which he had been trained when he studied theology and philology, to the study of primary texts. He regarded the understanding of primary texts as fundamental to historical research. In his seminars at the University of Berlin, where he was appointed professor in 1825, he read historical sources with his students and taught them his text-critical methods. His seminars became models, and other universities—such as Breslau, beginning in 1832—followed his example. Soon Ranke’s research techniques came to be regarded as the only legitimate basis for serious historical writing [HARDTWIG 1990: 13–57]. Fundamental to Ranke’s work was the historicist approach, which assumes that each age is unique (“immediate to God,” as he called it), that the past is therefore different from the present, and that a process of change links past and present, making it possible always to explain the present by past developments. Ranke’s importance lay in his contribution to making history one of the foremost scholarly and educational disciplines, his development of the critical method, and his substantial works. These, however, are more broad surveys than analyses. Among them are *The Ottoman and the*

2) For example, Ōtsuka [1977: 10–11] and Martin [1995: 17–76].

3) This paper is based on research presented in more detail in Mehl [1992, 1993a, 1998a].

Spanish Empires in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (1827), *The Popes of Rome, Their Church and State in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1834–1836), and *History of the Reformation in Germany* (1845–1847) [MARWICK 1989: 42–43; BRUCH and MÜLLER 1991: 247–149].

Ranke's earliest disciple and one of his most famous ones was Heinrich von Sybel (1817–1895), who introduced historical seminars in Marburg and, more important, in Munich [SEIER 1971: 24–38]. Munich became a center for historical research under King Maximilian II, who had studied with Ranke and had Ranke give lectures to him in 1854. With the king's support, Sybel established a department of history at the University of Munich in 1857. He founded the first professional historical journal, the *Historische Zeitschrift*, in 1859. The collection and publication of documents also owe much to Sybel. He became the first secretary of the Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy, established by King Maximilian and directed by Ranke, who had suggested its creation; when Ranke died in 1886, Sybel succeeded him [SCHNABEL 1958: 7–69].

The commission's aim was to collect and publish sources of German history in an authoritative text and correct chronology and, if possible, to establish causal relationships. It employed scholars from all over Germany. Another task was the compilation of historical annals, the *Jahrbücher zur deutschen Geschichte*. The suggestion to gather this information had come from Ranke, who was already working on the annals with his students; his intention was to provide a reliable basis for further research and writing [SCHNABEL 1958: 37, 38]. Beyond its scholarly purpose of publishing sources, the commission was to encourage historical writings that "through stimulating form and ethical content will excite patriotic feelings and national consciousness, bring to the mind of the people the rich abundance of its past, and thus provide the spirit of the nation with strong and fruitful nourishment" [SCHNABEL 1958: 50].

Sybel's contribution to the organization of historical scholarship was even greater than Ranke's. The advance of the historical seminar, introduced by Ranke, at German universities owes much to him, and he initiated several projects to publish documents: *Publications from the Prussian State Archives*, *Acta Borussica*, *Political Correspondence of Frederick the Great*, and *Acts of the German Imperial Diet* [SEIER 1971: 32–33]. Moreover it was Sybel who, after becoming director of the Prussian Archives, proposed the establishment of a historical institute in Rome in 1883, together with Georg Waitz, Wilhelm Wattenbach, and Julius von Weizsäcker [ELZE and ESCH 1990]. In 1880–1881 Pope Leo XIII had opened the secret archives of the Vatican, and in 1881 the Austrian Historical Institute had been founded. The Prussian Academy of Science set up a committee, of which Sybel was a member, to determine the aims of an institute for Germany; and in 1888 the German Historical Institute was founded to conduct research into German history and to publish documents.

3. HISTORY AND THE NATION IN GERMANY

Historical studies in Germany developed in parallel to the nation-state and were inspired by the search for national identity: that is, by political and ideological rather than by scholarly concerns. National unification came later to Germany than to its neighbors. The founding of the German empire in 1871 created the framework for the development of a national state that was accepted by its citizens [MOMMSEN 1990: 12–13]. Historicism, which became the dominant school of historical writing, was well suited to give meaning to the nation-state. Historicism emphasizes the uniqueness and value of each situation and people in a given time and place; it explains everything, including the nation, as a natural outcome of past developments.⁴⁾

For Sybel, who was himself politically active (1848, member of the pre-parliament in Frankfurt; 1862–1864 and 1874–1880, member of the Prussian House of Representatives; 1875–1895, director of the Prussian Archives in Berlin and semi-official historian of the German empire), political decisions had to be directed by historical tradition [HARDTWIG 1990: 232–233]. Sybel saw history as a continuous chain of causes and effects and concluded that it was possible to objectively know and completely reconstruct the past. He thus had a reliable standard for making decisions: historical success. Sybel recognized early on the potential of history for legitimizing the wish for German unity among the educated middle classes [SEIER 1971: 32].

The close relationship between historical writing and the concerns of the day was a characteristic of historicist writing. This relationship was expressed, for example, in the idea that a German constitution had to be appropriate to German tradition and the German national character. That a constitution should reflect the historical development and character of the nation was stressed by Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890) when he advised the Japanese on their constitution. Sybel and other historians of the time viewed it as their task to influence the political actions of their contemporaries. Many besides Sybel were politically active themselves; Droysen was a representative of the Prussian government in the Bundestag (the assembly that managed the affairs of the German Confederation) in Frankfurt; Ranke, Theodor Mommsen, Droysen, Treitschke, and others were active publicists. They endeavored to discuss political and social problems of the day from the perspective of their historical knowledge. Their collected essays appeared in books that stood on the shelves of educated citizens [HARDTWIG 1990: 104, 225, 230, 233–234]. Ranke himself had taken for granted the importance of historical writing for politics [HARDTWIG 1990: 112; MARWICK 1989: 44]. Droysen, the first representative of the Prussian school of historiography, went even further, describing his intention in the *History of Prussian Politics* (1855–1886) as

4) For an excellent discussion of historicism, see Jaeger and Rösen [1992].

representing the past in order to provide orientation for the present and future. The historian's task was to provide principles for action in foreign politics [HARDTWIG 1990: 103–160, 107, 112]. Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1898), in his *German History in the Nineteenth Century* (1871), stated that he wished to “give the political consciousness of the Germans a Protestant-Prussian identity” [HARDTWIG 1990: 154].

4. OFFICIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY IN JAPAN

The development of historical scholarship as an academic discipline, with a defined area of study and a canon of methods and organizational structures, as well as its function in legitimizing the nation-state, greatly attracted Japanese scholars and officials when they looked toward German historical scholarship for inspiration. Historicism, with its emphasis on individuality and evolution, would also have seemed attractive. In the 1870s, representatives of the Japanese Enlightenment were inspired by European philosophical discussions of “universal history,” such as those by François Guizot (1787–1874), *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* (translated 1874–1877); Thomas Henry Buckle (1821–1861), *History of Civilisation in England* (translated 1875); and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), *The Principles of Sociology* (translated 1882). They wrote a new kind of Japanese history, known as “history of civilization” (*bunmeishi*). The most important works of this kind were *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* (Outline of a Theory of Civilization, 1875) by Fukuzawa Yukichi and *Nihon kaika shōshi* (A Short History of Enlightenment in Japan, 1877–1882) by Taguchi Ukichi. Fukuzawa and Taguchi treated Japanese history as the history of human progress, reflecting the general trend toward Westernization and modernization. The standard of progress, however, was the West; thus Japan was relegated to the position of a “backward” nation [TANAKA 1993: 45]. In contrast, historicism offered the possibility of interpreting Japan's development as individual and unique without comparing it unfavorably to allegedly more advanced nations.

Asserting Japan's place as a nation by writing its history was on the Meiji government's agenda from the start. In April 1869, the following imperial rescript was issued:

Historiography is a forever immortal state ritual (*taiten*) and a wonderful act of our ancestors. But after the *Six National Histories* it was interrupted and no longer continued. Is this not a great lack! Now the evil of misrule by the warriors since the Kamakura period has been overcome and imperial government has been restored. Therefore we desire that an office of historiography (*shikyoku*) be established, that the good customs of our ancestors be resumed, and that knowledge and education be spread throughout the land, and so we appoint a president. Let us set right the relations between monarch and subject, distinguish clearly between the alien and the proper (*ka'i naigai*), and implant virtue throughout our land [quoted in Ōkubo 1988:

42].⁵⁾

The rescript expresses the justification of the Restoration as *ōsei fukko*, restoration of imperial rule modeled on the imperial bureaucratic state of the Nara and Heian periods. During this period the *Six National Histories (Rikkokushi)* had been compiled. Thus, following the Chinese tradition of dynastic histories, the compilation of a definite standard history (*seishi*) came to be regarded as the task of a legitimate government; in early Meiji the *seishi* remained the ideal of historiography, just as the imperial bureaucratic state was a political ideal.⁶⁾

The rescript sanctioned an office in the Daigakkō (as the former *bakufu* institute Shōheizaka Gakumonjo was now named), which was the first government institution of higher education in Tokyo and an office for administering education throughout the country. In 1871, after government was centralized, the office was reopened as the Department of History (Rekishika) in the Council of State (Dajōkan), the highest executive organ. It was reorganized and renamed the Office of Historiography (Shūshikyoku) in 1875, just after the Osaka conference had resolved a political crisis, as disagreements within and widespread protest without forced the government to reassert its legitimacy.

From 1875 onward the history of official historiography is well documented and we have the first detailed information about who was in the office. The typical "historiographer" was born around 1830 and educated in the Confucian tradition, had been politically active around the time of the Restoration, and came from one of the domains that had helped to overthrow the *bakufu*. This profile was probably similar to that of government officials in general; it appears, however, that appointment to the Office of Historiography was often a sign of waning political influence [MEHL 1998a: 35–43]. The most important member was Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827–1910), who became deputy director in September 1875 and was one of the first professional historians in Japan. He came from Satsuma domain, where he had gained experience in writing history by compiling a chronological history of Japan titled *Kōchō seikan*, based on the *Dainihonshi* (History of Great Japan) of Mito domain and completed in 1865. Shigeno was the leading member of the Office of Historiography and its successor organizations until 1893.

During the 1870s, Shigeno and his colleagues did not work on actually writing the history of Japan, but concentrated their efforts on collecting primary sources. They were also searching for an appropriate form for the new national history and thus attempted to find out about Western methods of historiography. Since they could not read Western languages and translations were few, this knowledge was difficult to obtain. But an opportunity presented itself in 1878, when Suematsu Kenchō (1855–1920) set off for England as a secretary to the Japanese Legation.

5) For a brief discussion of this text, see Hérail [1984].

6) Sakamoto [1983: 29–30] has pointed out the close link between the imperial bureaucratic *ritsu ryō* state and the *Six National Histories*.

The Office of Historiography entrusted him with “the investigation of English and French methods of historical compilation.”⁷⁾ Suematsu embarked on this task with enthusiasm and commissioned the scholar and lecturer George Gustavus Zerffi (1821–1892) to write a book on the subject. *The Science of History* was published in 1879 and duly sent to the Office of Historiography; but it turned out to be of limited use to the members of the office, who in the end stuck to traditional methods of compiling sources and chronicling events.

In 1881 a political crisis (Meiji Jūyonen no Seihen) occurred that was not dissimilar to the crisis that had ended in 1875. The government was again threatened by disunity from within and widespread protest from without; again it reasserted itself by resorting to compromise. Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), who had called for the immediate formation of an elected parliament, was expelled from government; at the same time an edict promised an elected parliament by 1890. In the following years preparations were made for the proclamation of a constitution and the opening of a parliament. While Westernization reached a climax in the “Rokumeikan era,” the “conservative 1880s” also saw a revival of Japanese traditions, including the teaching of Chinese and Japanese classics at the Department of Classics (Koten Kōshūka) in the Imperial University and the Institute for Japanese Philology (Kōten Kōkyūjo), both founded in 1882 [MEHL 1998a: 26–34].

Official historiography became part of these preparations, which were intended to ensure that the constitution would be firmly embedded in and legitimized by Japanese tradition. Progress in the office appears to have been hampered by underfunding, involvement in too many different tasks, and differences of opinion among its members. The Office of Historiography was reorganized to become more hierarchical in structure. Compiling a chronological history, which had been one of many tasks of the office, was explicitly named as its central aim. The history, titled *Dainihon hennenshi* (Chronological History of Great Japan), was a strictly chronological work, written in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) and covering the period from the fourteenth century to 1868 [MEHL 1998a: 81–86]. As its title suggests, it was heavily indebted to the *Dainihonshi* of the late Mito school. Indeed, it was perceived as a sequel to the *Dainihonshi*, which came to be recognized as a standard history. The decision to write the new history in *kanbun* was criticized by scholars and officials who felt that a national history should be written in Japanese. The compilers of the *Dainihon hennenshi*, however, like the compilers of the *Dainihonshi* before them, did not perceive writing in *kanbun* to be writing in a foreign language. *Kanbun* was still the language of scholarship. Again there is a parallel with Germany, as the motto for the *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, cited above, suggests. Although the MGH is a prime example of

7) *Shiryō hansen shimatsu* in the Historiographical Institute; see Mehl [1998a: 71–80], and a more detailed account in Mehl [1992: 124–138]. On Suematsu in England, see Mehl [1993c].

historical scholarship inspired by nationalism, the prefaces and editorial remarks to the early volumes are in Latin (as are of course most of the sources compiled in them), still considered to be the common language of scholarship at the time.

Work on the *Dainihon hennenshi* began in early 1882, and the sources indicate that it was to be completed by 1890.

5. THE BEGINNINGS OF HISTORY AS AN AUTONOMOUS DISCIPLINE

In 1889 the Meiji Constitution was promulgated, and in the same year a department of Japanese history was opened at the Imperial University in Tokyo. In 1887 a department of (Western) history had been set up and the German Ludwig Rieß appointed as the first professor of history. In 1888 the Office of Historiography had been moved to the university; thus the former government office became part of the organization of historical scholarship at university level. Its leading members—Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827–1910), Kume Kunitake (1839–1931), and Hoshino Hisashi (1839–1917)—became professors of history. Through their colleague Ludwig Rieß the members of the Historiographical Institute had the opportunity to learn more about Western methods of historical scholarship, and later his students became members of the institute. The school of history that developed at the Imperial University and came to dominate academic history is known as *akademizumu*, characterized by positivism, preoccupation with documents and verifiable facts, and closeness to the state. It is influenced by Sino-Japanese methods of textual criticism in the tradition of *kōshōgaku* (school of verification and proofs), as well as by German methods of historical research. *Kōshōgaku* originated in China during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) as a branch of Confucian studies consisting of the close examination and interpretation of Confucian classics. In Japan it became part of mainstream Confucianism, and by the late Tokugawa period its methods were applied to the study of Japanese texts. The text-critical approach was similar to the text-critical methods introduced to the study of history by Ranke and his disciples and brought to Japan by Rieß, who had studied in Berlin, and by Japanese students returning from Germany. This similarity as well as the importance of the German influence are often stressed by historians. The first generation of professors in the Department of History were, however, deeply rooted in the tradition of *kangaku* (Chinese learning). In fact, Shigeno, one of the founders of the modern discipline of Japanese history, was chiefly known as a *kangaku* scholar in his time and he always looked on China as the source of true learning. A good example of his views is his lecture “*Rekishi hensan no hōhō o ronzu*” (Discussing the Methods for Compiling a National History, 1879), in which Chinese historiography, especially the definitive standard history (*seishi*), is treated as the standard by which he measures all works of history [SHIGENO 1989: 1.1–8]. In this lecture, given while Suematsu was doing research in London for the Office of Historiography, Shigeno also discusses European historiography, but his own work shows no evidence of Western influence. His

views are also well conveyed in his lecture “Gakumon wa tsui ni kōshō ni ki su” (All Scholarship is in the Final Analysis *Kōshō* Textual Criticism, 1890) [SHIGENO 1989: 1.35–47]. Shigeno maintained that the *kōshō* method would remain the basis of all scholarship. Kume, Shigeno’s most significant colleague at the Historiographical Institute, was equally strongly influenced by the *kangaku* tradition. But he had been exposed to Western knowledge early in life, having grown up near Nagasaki and traveled in the West as a member of the Iwakura mission in 1871–1873. He was also influenced by the Japanese Enlightenment historians, such as Taguchi Ukichi, for whose journal *Shikai* (founded in 1891) he wrote regularly.

Akademizumu was said to be objective because it adhered to a strict canon of methods for verifying historical facts. It did not, however, address the problems of selecting and representing those facts. The scholars at the institute wanted to write history free from political and moral bias. They believed that if they recorded the historical facts “as they were” (*ari no mama*) their meaning would become apparent. Of course, their writings reflected the preconceptions of the authors just as much as any other historical work does. One of the first works the office completed was *Nihon shiryaku* (Outline of the History of Japan), prepared for the world exhibition in Paris in 1878. It was later revised and published as *Kokushigan* (View of Our National History), which was used as a textbook at the Imperial University and was adapted for use in schools. Although little more than a chronological table of facts, it represented national history as imperial history and as divine history [KETELAAR 1990: 192] in the tradition of the ancient chronicles. It can hardly be said to be objective; nor was it what the compilers believed to be historical truth. By starting the *Dainihon hennenshi* where the *Dainihonshi* left off, the members of the Office of History subsequently avoided having to decide how to present Japan’s earliest history. Nevertheless, the *Dainihon hennenshi* too was in line with earlier histories, most notably the *Dainihonshi*, in that it interpreted Japanese history as imperial history.

Even so, the scholars’ claim to be objective has to be respected, especially as they held to it at not inconsiderable cost to themselves. At the time Shigeno and his colleagues were striving to write unbiased history, history was playing an important part in the formation of a national ideology in the late Meiji period. There was widespread interest in history, culminating in the “historical fever” diagnosed by the media in the early 1890s. As conflicting demands were made on history, tensions grew; they found their expression in the widespread indignation aroused by Shigeno Yasutsugu’s “obliteration theories” (*massatsu ron*), the Kume affair of 1892, and the textbook controversy of 1911. Shigeno dismissed many of the stories surrounding popular heroes from Japanese history—especially those of Kusunoki Masashige, who fought for Emperor Godaigo in the Kemmu Restoration in the fourteenth century—as fiction. His allegations were widely reported in the press and did much to discredit *akademizumu* among the public and those political and intellectual leaders who were striving to foster national consciousness among the people [MEHL 1998a: 121–126].

Kume Kunitake's article "Shinto is an Outdated Custom of Heaven Worship" ("Shintō wa saiten no kozoku"), published in the popular history journal *Shikai* in 1892, caused even more outrage [MEHL 1993b]. Kume's stated aim was to examine modern religious practices and the origins of heaven worship in the Orient. The contents of his article were provocative, for he claimed that Shinto was not a religion but merely a primitive cult of heaven worship that had evolved during the infancy of mankind. While in other countries heaven worship had been superseded by religions with a dogma and a moral code of behavior, in Japan the primitive cult still remained. These statements aroused the indignation of the Shintoists and scholars of National Learning, who in their criticism relied on moral rather than scholarly arguments, accusing Kume of disloyalty toward the imperial house. They used their influence with the government, with the result that Kume was dismissed from his post at the Imperial University.

The textbook controversy centered on the portrayal in the first history textbook compiled under the auspices of the Ministry of Education of the northern and southern imperial courts during the period of schism in the fourteenth century (*nanbokuchō seijunron*). The dispute ended with an imperial edict deciding a question of historical interpretation against the judgment of professional historians. Subsequently, even historians such as Mikami Sanji (1865–1939), Shigeno's and Kume's successor at the Historiographical Institute, stressed the difference between historical scholarship and history for educational purposes [MEHL 1998a: 140–147].

By 1911 the attempt to write a standard history in the tradition of the *Six National Histories* had already been abandoned. In 1893, the institute had been closed. The closure was only partly a result of the Kume affair. The lack of progress on the *Dainihon hennenshi* and the kind of scholarship practiced by Shigeno and his colleagues had long been targets of criticism. The scholars had concentrated their efforts on the collection of sources, even after work on the *Dainihon hennenshi* was begun. As noted above, the *Dainihon hennenshi* itself was written in Sino-Japanese and steeped in the traditions of Chinese learning (*kangaku*), already perceived to be outdated. The Historiographical Institute was reopened two years later, but now its sole purpose was to collect, arrange, and publish documents, a function it fulfills to this day [MEHL 1998a: 133–140].

6. GERMANY AS A MODEL FOR JAPAN?

This very brief sketch of developments in Germany and Japan shows the close relationship between historical scholarship and the nation in both countries. It also shows that Japan did not simply follow the German example. For one thing, these developments were largely contemporaneous. Moreover Japan was inspired by and drew on its own scholarly and political traditions: the idea of the *seishi*, *kōshōgaku*, and the achievements of scholarship in the Tokugawa period—especially the *Dainihonshi* and Hanawa Hokiichi's *Shiryō*, which was the model for

all the office's compilations of sources, including *Dainihon shiryō*, work on which was begun after the reopening of the Institute and continues to this day. Rieß's influence on Japanese scholarship is often vastly overrated, and its emphasis by Japanese scholars is itself an example of history (here the history of the discipline) written for legitimation.

So how did the German example serve Japan? Confirmation was probably the most important contribution. German scholarship was most influential where it confirmed existing tendencies, most significantly the emphasis on objectivity. By the 1880s, the focus of German historical scholarship had shifted from historical knowledge in narrative form to techniques of research and textual criticism. It was this aspect of German historical scholarship that was most influential abroad, and the one-sided reception of Ranke the "quasi-positivist" (ignoring his interpretation of history and narrative style) is not unique to Japan.⁸⁾

The stress on "scientific" history is one reason why the German example did not help Japan solve the crucial problem of finding a framework for interpreting its own history. German historiography did not help Shigeno and his colleagues become interpreters of the nation; their lives and works did not shape the Japanese empire as those of the German historians shaped the German empire.⁹⁾ History was as important to the Japanese as to the German nation; but in Japan it was not the professional scholars at government institutions who provided the kind of history that suited the nation best.¹⁰⁾

Yet Shigeno and his colleagues saw themselves as engaging in an important task for the government, and Shigeno expressed an interest in Western historical writing as early as 1875. Why then did they fail to complete a history for the new nation? First, official historiography was too much bound up with the Chinese dynastic tradition, which is why it had never had the same impact in Japan as in China; there, different dynasties succeeded one another and historians under each new dynasty would write the history of the preceding one. Second, Shigeno was nevertheless very much like a Chinese scholar-official who was aloof from the masses. German historians, on the contrary, saw themselves as spokesmen for the German citizen; their role was to express the will of the people and, by "professing," to make knowledge accessible to everyone.

Third, the typical form of German historicist writing was the epic narrative, indebted to the tradition of history as an art form. In contrast, the typical form of the *akademizumu* school was the positivist article, focusing on textual criticism and isolated facts and addressing a small circle of scholars. Despite their interest in Western historical narrative, Shigeno and his colleagues never applied to their own work what their investigations revealed. Their historical compilations took the

8) See Mehl [1998a: 160–161] and Breisach [1994: 237]; see also Novick [1988].

9) The following summarizes some of the main points treated in more detail in the final chapter of Mehl [1998a].

10) The different kinds of history being written are treated in Mehl [1998b].

annalistic form adopted by official historiography for centuries, and their scholarly articles dealt with specific facts and events, usually without relating them to a wider context.

Fourth, the failure of the Japanese scholar-officials to find an appropriate form for their national history reflected their failure to develop an interpretation of Japan's history that took into account the rapid changes Japan was experiencing and did justice to the country's new situation and position in the world. An answer to this challenge emerged only in the following generation with the concept of *tōyōshi*, which gave Japan both an Asian past and a position of superiority within Asia [TANAKA 1993].

Closely tied up with the problem of interpretation is what was perhaps the ultimate problem—the dilemma of Hidemaro in Mori Ōgai's novel *As If* (*Kano yō ni*, 1912): How could the historian write a history that clearly distinguished between myth and fact and still preserve the myths that give meaning to the nation? How could Shigeno and his colleagues reconcile their view that historians must be free from political and moral bias with their belief that history had a vital part to play in fostering a sense of nation and enabling the citizens of that nation to orient themselves to a new international context? The problem is not simply one of "objectivity" versus bias; objectivity is unattainable, because any representation of history, including the annalistic form adopted for the *Dainihon hennenshi* and the *Dainihon shiryō*, involves choices that are not "given" by the material itself.

In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century both German and Japanese historians had given up trying to address this dilemma, retreating into the accumulation of sources and the verification of facts. And in both countries the failure to address the relationship between historical facts and their representation resulted in historical scholarship being all too vulnerable to distortion serving the ends of nationalist ideology.

7. CONCLUSION: JAPAN AND GERMANY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The similarities in the way history evolved as an academic discipline in nineteenth-century Japan and Germany raise the question of how the relationship between history and the nation-state developed in the twentieth century, especially in the period of Japanese militarism and ultranationalism and of German National Socialism. A detailed analysis and comparison is beyond the scope of this article, but I shall briefly examine the way academic history with its claim to being scientific and objective failed to resist the distortion of history for political and ideological ends.

One difference immediately becomes evident. The Third Reich did not bring forth a uniform interpretation of German history comparable to *kōkoku shikan*, the ultranationalist version of history that described the unbroken line of emperors as the essence of the Japanese national polity and treated the myths of the deities as

history.¹¹⁾ In historiography, as in other areas, the competition between different institutions and persons tolerated by Hitler's government prevented any one individual or department from gaining ascendancy. Besides, National Socialist rule could not and did not claim to be based on an unbroken tradition in the way that Japanese imperial rule did.

The man most commonly associated with *kōkoku shikan* is Hiraizumi Kiyoshi (1895–1984), who had studied with the scholars of the *akademizumu* school at Tokyo Imperial University and succeeded Mikami Sanji as the director of the Historiographical Institute. Hiraizumi's early work on medieval Japan is still respected, but in the mid-1920s he expressly distanced himself from the overemphasis of facts and evidence and called for a "synthesizing" approach, which seeks genuine truth and is an art (*geijutsu*) rather than a science (*kagaku*) [SAITŌ 1984: 95, 99, 103]. His interpretation of Japan's history while the Japanese colonial empire was at its height provided legitimation at the cost of the "objectivity" that Shigeno and his colleagues had prized so highly. Hiraizumi was isolated among his colleagues; he resigned at the end of the war, and most of his work is now thoroughly discredited.

The most visible representative of National Socialist history was Walter Frank (1905–1945), president of the Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands (Imperial Institute for the History of the New Germany), which he had helped to establish after effecting the destruction of the Historical Commission of the Reich. The institute never published any scholarship of consequence and was soon embroiled in disputes between different ideologues of the Third Reich and their organizations. Frank was sacked in 1941 and took his life on the day Germany capitulated. Frank saw history as a fighting discipline with close ties to the national events of the times; however, no new historical discipline was established during the Third Reich [BRUCH and MÜLLER 1991: 95–96].

As in Japan, the historical discipline as a whole tended to accommodate itself to the oppressive regime while giving it minimal active support. The preoccupation of mainstream German history with methodology and its theoretical weakness resulted in a vacuum that National Socialism could fill with its own, heavily politicized conception of science, which ultimately broke with the tradition [JAEGER and RÜSEN 1992: 95–112]. In both countries the distortion of historical scholarship in the 1930s was made possible by conflicting assumptions about history existing side by side; Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen [1992: 111], describing the German situation, speak of a confusion of paradigms. In Germany the idea of naturalism, with "life" as its standard, had competed with historicism since the 1870s [Jaeger and Rüsen 1992: 109, 111]¹²⁾ and could be taken up by National Socialism. In Japan the idea of Japanese history as imperial history had never been completely

11) See Nagahara [1983]; on Hiraizumi, see Saitō [1984: 88–110].

12) See, e.g., Nietzsche [1980].

abandoned; even the representatives of *akademizumu* had not dismissed it outright.

In both countries the problems of objectivity and of the relationship between the search for historical truth and the representation of history remain unresolved. In postwar Japan, historical objectivity reemerged and became dominant; issues of theory and understanding were neglected [TANAKA 1993: 283]. There, positivist studies still dominate the field [AKITA 1982]. Narrowly focused articles offering a wealth of facts and extensive quotations from the sources (*shiryō*), but minimal interpretation, appear in innumerable scholarly journals. At the same time, historical novels, some based on thorough research, are extremely popular and (unlike in Germany) far more influential than the works of professional historians.¹³ The Ministry of Education (Monbushō) still upholds the distinction between “pure” and “applied” history to defend the treatment of Japanese history in school textbooks; and its alleged attempts to revive an emperor-centered ideology are criticized by many historians, including members of the Historiographical Institute [MEHL 1998a: 153–154].

In Germany, too, the legacy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been slow to diminish. The premises of historicism were consciously taken up again after 1945 and not seriously challenged until the much-cited paradigm shift of the 1970s, when social history and historical social science were proposed as alternatives to historicism [JAEGER and RÜSEN 1992: 181–185]. The relationship between historical facts and their representation has only comparatively recently come to be more widely discussed, with the conception of the “narrative structure of historical knowledge” and the analysis of historical narrative providing new insights into the nature of historical thinking and writing [JAEGER and RÜSEN 1992: 188–192].

Given this failure to address these questions and come to terms with the earlier history of the discipline, it is hardly surprising that new attempts to exploit interpretations of the past for nationalist ends have surfaced. In the 1980s there was a feeling among conservative intellectuals in both countries that a sense of national identity needed reinforcement and that history could provide it [MEHL 1992: 273–275]. In Germany these discussions became mixed with the perennial debates about the Third Reich, culminating in the “Historikerstreit” in the summer of 1986. In Japan similar attempts at recurring to the past to remedy a perceived lack of national consciousness occurred at the same time as the debates about the responsibility of Emperor Shōwa for the war reached a new height in the months preceding his death.

Since then, both countries have experienced changes. In Japan, the end of the Shōwa era (perceived as a significant break, though it may seem like no more than a change in name), the prolonged economic recession that began at the end of 1991,

13) An example of a historical novel that stays close to historical facts and even includes summaries of primary documents is Matsumoto [1975].

and the fall of the Liberal Democratic Party (which had dominated Japanese politics for almost forty years) have highlighted the changes that the country has undergone since 1945. In Germany, the fall of the Berlin wall and the unification of the two German republics in 1989–1990 showed even more clearly how transient ideas about national identity and national history can be.

We have yet to see how both countries deal with these new challenges and where new conceptions of history will lead. At present it would appear that the story of history and national identity has not come to an end, and that the tensions experienced by Japanese and German historians in the nineteenth century—between truth and myth, fact and interpretation, disinterestedness and partisanship, science and art, research and writing—have to be confronted anew by their successors.

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