

# German Social Science, Meiji Conservatism, and the Peculiarities of Japanese History\*

ERIK GRIMMER-SOLEM  
*Wesleyan University*

## THE GERMAN ORIGINS OF JAPANESE EXCEPTIONALISM

Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British minister in Tokyo, remarked in 1863 that Japan was a land of paradoxes impelled “by some occult law . . . in a perfectly opposite direction and reversed order.”<sup>1</sup> This view of Japan, borrowed directly from Herodotus’s description of the ancient Egyptians, has had a long career among foreign observers of Japan and drives the notion of Japanese exceptionalism to this day. Yet as historians of Japan know, the Western notion of Japanese peculiarity is newer than is often realized. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), a German doctor in Dutch service in Japan and author of the celebrated *History and Description of Japan* (1777–1779), admired Japan as familiar, similar to Europe, and, in some respects, a civilization ahead of the West.<sup>2</sup>

---

\* An early version of this article was presented at the University of Chicago workshop “Japan in the World, the World in Japan” in May 2001, and I gratefully acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Tetsuo Najita. A revised draft was then presented at the German Studies Association conference in Washington, DC, in October 2001. I thank Dieter Buse and Nancy Wingfield for their useful comments. Bill Johnston, Donald Levine, Bruce Masters, Devin Pendas, and David Titus gave valuable feedback on later drafts, and Michael Eastwood and Miwa Katsumata provided assistance translating Japanese sources.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Endymion Wilkinson, *Japan versus the West: Image and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Josef Kreiner, “Deutschland—Japan. Die frühen Jahrhunderte,” in *Deutschland—Japan. Historische Kontakte*, ed. Josef Kreiner (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1984), pp. 1–53, here pp. 23, 30–31.

A trend beginning with the Enlightenment subsumed Japan into a uniform progress of human civilization with Europe at its pinnacle; Japan and the rest of East Asia began to compare unfavorably, feeding stereotypes and preconceptions that have distorted the West's understanding of Japan ever since.<sup>3</sup>

While this progressive, orientaling telos is most readily associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberal opinion,<sup>4</sup> it was hardly confined to any single point on the ideological spectrum or, for that matter, to Europeans and Americans. A particularly influential interpretation of Japanese exceptionalism was developed by interwar Japanese Marxists building on the "Asiatic mode of production"—itself a notoriously imprecise concept derived largely from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British economists and European travel literature—one that greatly overestimated the feudal nature of Japanese society and exaggerated the role of the Meiji state in the development of the Japanese economy.<sup>5</sup> Through the pioneering work of the historian E. H. Norman and his students, a version of this interpretation in turn came to dominate not only mid twentieth-century American scholarship on Meiji Japan, but also the policies of the American military occupation in Japan after 1945.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 33. On this process more broadly, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> On British liberal imperialism, see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> For analysis of this strand of thinking, see especially Germaine Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Günther Distelrath, *Die japanische Produktionsweise. Zur Wissenschaftlichen Genese einer stereotypen Sicht der japanischen Wirtschaft*, Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien der Philipp-Franz-von-Siebold-Stiftung, no. 18 (Munich: Iudicum Verlag, 1996); and Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der Verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan, 1945–1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). There is also a large critical literature on Japanese exceptionalism in the field of Japanese Studies (*Nihonjinron*). See here Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society: A Study in the Structure of Social Reality* (London: KPI, 1986); and Aoki Tamotsu, *Der Japandiskurs im historischen Wandel. Zur Kultur und Identität einer Nation*, trans. Stephan Biedermann, Robert Horres, Marc Löhr, and Annette Schad-Seifert, Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien der Philipp-Franz-von-Siebold-Stiftung, no. 14 (Munich: Iudicum Verlag, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Norman closely followed the interpretation of the Kōza faction of Japanese Communists led by Yamada Moritarō, who argued that the Meiji restoration was not a bourgeois-democratic revolution but instead an absolutist coup initiated by landed interests, creating a semifeudal society with a semicapitalist economy in which the state initiated industrialization in response to external military pressures. See E. Herbert Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Period* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1946 [1940]). On Norman's influ-

With exceptionalism figuring so centrally in prewar narratives of Japan, it is not surprising that comparisons would be drawn to that other modern deviant—Germany—a comparison obviously heavily encouraged by the two countries' ties in World War II. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the *Sonderweg* thesis—the notion that Germany pursued a peculiar and ultimately dangerous path of historical development set in the nineteenth century that culminated in National Socialism—should come to figure quite as centrally in the historical assessment of a country halfway around the globe.<sup>7</sup> In a nutshell, the argument is that Japanese officials, academics, and students in law, government, economics, as well as other fields, developed a close relationship with their German counterparts during the 1880s that lasted well through the twentieth century. A number of these German influences would justify authoritarian, statist, semi-feudal, and nativist tendencies in Meiji Japan, thereby reinforcing Japanese peculiarity and deviance from liberal-democratic patterns of development.

One of the first to analyze this pathological Japanese-German relationship in the postwar era was Robert Scalapino, who sought to bolster the “failure thesis” of Japanese liberal democracy.<sup>8</sup> In the 1960s, Reinhard Bendix, applying the modernization theories developed by Talcott Parsons and Alexander Gerschenkron, compared Germany and Japan to explore the “partial development” of latecomers to economic modernity.<sup>9</sup> Such interpretations were then critically extended and deepened by Kenneth Pyle.<sup>10</sup> In subsequent publications, most notably in the 1974 article “The Advantages of Followership,” restated in the

---

ence, see John W. Dower, ed., *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E. H. Norman* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), pp. 3–103; Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation*, pp. 326–329; and Distelrath, *Die Japanische Produktionsweise*, pp. 125–138.

<sup>7</sup> The literature that has constructed the German *Sonderweg* thesis is large, but key works are Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation* (New York: Scribner, 1960); Fritz R. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967; Anchor Books, 1969); Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871–1918*, trans. by Kim Traynor (Oxford: Berg, 1985 [1973]).

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), pp. 71–72, 391–392, 396–399.

<sup>9</sup> Reinhard Bendix, “Preconditions of Development: A Comparison of Japan and Germany,” in *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, ed. R. P. Dore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 27–68.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

1989 chapter “Meiji Conservatism” in the *Cambridge History of Japan*, Pyle concluded that exposure to German economic, political, and legal thought, and particularly the “German Historical School of Economics,” helped nudge Japan in a “conservative” direction, providing its social scientists and bureaucrats with the technologies of collectivism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. These in turn reinforced Japan’s peculiar tendencies and led to a pathological course of historical development that deviated sharply from that pursued by Western liberal democracies.<sup>11</sup>

While not monolithic, Pyle’s interpretation has been very influential, one that few would doubt has formatively shaped the contours of Japanese and East Asian historiography since the 1970s. By way of example, Andrew Barshay, Sheldon Garon, Carol Gluck, and Germaine Hoston all make direct, or indirect, use of Pyle’s interpretation of the Japanese-German connection.<sup>12</sup> Pyle’s perspective has also influenced German historians of Japan, most prominently Bernd Martin, and it continues to inform newer specialized scholarship on the development of the social sciences in Japan.<sup>13</sup> Andrew Barshay’s recent contribution on the history of the social sciences in Japan relies on a construction of the “German Historical School of Economics” as conservative and as giving license to neotraditionalism and authoritarianism, an interpretation that deviates hardly at all from Pyle’s 1974

---

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, “The Technology of Japanese Nationalism: The Local Improvement Movement, 1900–1918,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 33 (1973): 51–65; idem, “Advantages of Followership: German Economics and Japanese Bureaucrats,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 1 (1974): 127–164; idem, “Meiji Conservatism,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 674–720.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew E. Barshay, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 29, 61–66; Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 18–38, 75; idem, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 39–46; Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 27–29, 174; Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 87–89, 105–108, 180–186, 225–226, 335–338.

<sup>13</sup> Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), pp. 27, 48–49, 61 n. 44, 73 nn. 170 and 171; Jeffrey E. Hanes, *The City as Subject: Seki Hajime and the Reinvention of Modern Osaka* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 116–17, 121. While Hanes complicates the political tendency of German influences on a younger generation of Japanese economists coming of age in the late Meiji and early Taishō eras, he nevertheless presents a misleading picture of the German Historical School drawn from a limited base of Anglophone secondary sources and reaffirms Pyle’s assessment of the conservative and bureaucratic tendencies of the first generation of German-trained Japanese economists.

article.<sup>14</sup> Despite ongoing attempts to normalize Meiji Japanese history by forging new comparative and connective lines of research, scholarship on Meiji Japan and Meiji-era social science in the United States has remained insular, overwhelmingly Anglophone, and resistant to abandoning outdated interpretations. This has hindered a critical reassessment of the complex relationship between Meiji Japan and Imperial Germany in the social sciences.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in Ian Buruma's popular *Inventing Japan*, which draws from this newer literature, the Japanese *Sonderweg*, shaped by sinister German influences, appears to be alive and well.<sup>16</sup> Much like the orientalist teleology of the Americans and Europeans who "opened" Japan to the West in the 1850s, this exceptionalist master narrative continues to serve an Americanizing and Westernizing agenda in present-day Japan and East Asia.

This essay is an attempt to raise questions about "Meiji conservatism" and its connection to German social science in the hope of initiating a discussion that will lead to greater conceptual precision, new perspectives, and further research in this field. While it will necessarily focus on Kenneth Pyle's writings on German social science in the early to middle Meiji era because of their clear status as a widely cited and influential interpretation, it should be understood that this essay is also a critique of the newer historiography that builds on this interpretation, and more obliquely, E. H. Norman's orientalist master narrative of the Meiji restoration that informs it.<sup>17</sup> Pyle's interpretation was developed in the 1970s and is heavily invested in interpretations of a German *Sonderweg* developed by historians of Germany that relied heavily on modernization theory and that have since been shown to be untenable or subject to extensive qualification. This essay draws on a body of newer literature on Imperial Germany, the development of German social science, and the rise of the German welfare state qualifying or questioning the German *Sonderweg* thesis, as well as German-language primary and secondary sources on Meiji-era social science that have been largely ignored by Anglophone historians of Japan.

---

<sup>14</sup> Andrew E. Barshay, "The Social Sciences in Japan," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7, ed. Theodore Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 515–534, here 517–518.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the collection of essays from the 1994 Harvard conference on Meiji studies in Helen Hardacre and Adam L. Kern, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), which is remarkable for the near absence of new research exploring the German-Japanese connection in the Meiji era.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan, 1853–1964* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), pp. 52–57.

<sup>17</sup> See n. 6 above.

As will be argued below, Meiji Japan's policies often appear more peculiar because they are not evaluated on the standard of comparable Western practice but instead in terms borrowed from mid nineteenth-century liberal theory. Japan's turn to German models is often exaggerated and made to appear more sinister, while developments in education, which made German standards of scholarship and teaching in the social sciences an international model that attracted enthusiastic imitators from many countries, have been played down or ignored. Likewise, the decline of liberalism after Meiji 14 (1881) is viewed in isolation, failing to take seriously the international discredit into which classical political economy and economic liberalism had fallen by the 1880s. Nor is Meiji Japan situated in the context of social reform movements, Progressivism, and New Liberalism that developed in Europe and America in the 1880s and 1890s. Furthermore, the construct of "Meiji conservatism" tied to German social science is predicated on a questionable and now outdated assessment of both the "German Historical School" and German welfare state and on an overestimation of their influence on Meiji Japan. A reassessment of the Japanese-German relationship from this perspective hopefully allows for a more nuanced analysis of the process of Japanese modernization, and consequently it may be possible to further normalize aspects of Meiji history still tied to a narrative of exceptionalism.

#### MID CENTURY LIBERALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY

Engelbert Kaempfer is a reminder that the interaction between Japan and the West was much older than is often realized and that it was formatively shaped by prevailing Western perceptions of itself. His case also reveals the importance of the historical specificity of that interaction and the intellectual baggage that it brought along with it. To fully understand the development of "Meiji conservatism" and its relationship to German social science, the specific kind of Western liberal thought popular in the 1860s and 1870s and brought to Japan is particularly relevant. It would be on the basis of such ideas that the process of Japanese modernization would be initiated and the rationale for specific economic and social policies would be derived. As will be seen, mid nineteenth-century Western liberal thought also became a historiographical benchmark for an assessment of the success of Japanese liberalism, divergence from which earned Japan the pejorative label "conservative."

The conviction that all of mankind was progressing toward a uniform, enlightened civilization of a European stamp held wide currency by mid century. This was a view that had profound implications for the assessment of “backward” civilizations by liberals, as Uday Singh Mehta has perceptively analyzed in the case of India.<sup>18</sup> Mehta has shown that such mid nineteenth-century liberals as John Stuart Mill and Thomas Macaulay were singularly unable to assess unfamiliar civilizations except as part of a teleology of progress in which Europeans, and particularly Britons, figured as superior and advanced while other civilizations and their way of life were dismissed as backward, incoherent, and provisional, a view that lent authority to paternalism and justified Imperial domination. This went so far as to deny the people of Asia a meaningful historical experience.<sup>19</sup> In his 1859 essay *On Liberty*, Mill himself asserted that

the progressive principle, . . . whether as the love of liberty or of improvement, is antagonistic to the sway of Custom, involving at least emancipation from that yoke; and the contest between the two constitutes the chief interest of the history of mankind. The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of Custom is complete. This is the case over the whole East.<sup>20</sup>

This variant of liberalism, in its heyday in the 1860s, was rapidly imported to Japan. The implications of its developmental teleology were particularly radical because of the urgency of the project of “modernizing,” arising as it did from the ongoing threat of the loss of independence brought by the end of isolation and the violation of Japanese sovereignty imposed by the unequal treaties negotiated with the Western powers in 1859 and 1866. The vehicle for the spread of liberal thought and of a Westernizing ideology throughout Japan in these years were scholars, societies, and journals associated with the *Bunmeikaika* (civilization and enlightenment) movement, which in its early guise—reflected in articles four and five of the Charter Oath of 1868<sup>21</sup>—meant systematically eradicating Japanese institutions and

---

<sup>18</sup> Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>20</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Articles four and five of the Charter Oath: “4.) All absurd usages shall be abandoned; justice and righteousness shall regulate all actions. 5.) Knowledge shall be sought all over the world, and thus shall be strengthened the foundation of the imperial polity.” “Appendix: Documents, Tokugawa Era Through the Meiji Period,” in *The Modernizers: Overseas*

the wholesale embrace of British, French, or American educational, legal, administrative, political, social, and economic models.<sup>22</sup>

The outstanding proponents of such a pattern of Westernization were those associated with the Meiji Six Society (*Meirokeisha*) and its journal, the *Meiroku zasshi*, most notably Mori Arinori (1847–1889), Nakamura Keiu (1832–1891), Nishi Amane (1829–1897), and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). Younger proponents of *Bunmeikaika* included the liberal economist Taguchi Ukichi (1857–1905, founder of the *Tokyo keizei zasshi* modeled on the London *Economist*) and Tokutomi Sohō (1863–1957). While hardly a uniform group of thinkers, these champions of *Bunmeikaika* nevertheless strongly identified with English liberal thought, drawing particularly radical implications from it and advocating extreme forms of individualism, materialism, utilitarian ethics, laissez-faire, and hostility to government. As the pages of the *Meiroku zasshi* reveal, a number of those associated with this movement went so far as to advocate radical reform or abandonment of such things as Japanese familial patterns, religion, and language.<sup>23</sup> More often, this mid century British liberal thought was rendered into familiar Confucian terms and modified to suit Japanese perceptions and conditions (Henry Buckle's *History of Civilization* [1857–1861], Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* [1859], Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* [1851], and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* were particularly popular in translation).<sup>24</sup>

---

*Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan*, ed. Ardath W. Burks (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Hirakawa Sukehiro, "Japan's turn to the West," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, ed. Marius B. Jansen, pp. 432–498. On the process of emulating and adapting Western organizational models, see especially D. Eleanor Westney, *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> William Reynolds Braisted, ed., *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). On these ideas and the "conservative" reaction to them see Pyle, *The New Generation*, pp. 23–98, and Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism," pp. 676–720. On Meiji economic liberalism, see Chuhei Sugiyama, *Origins of Economic Thought in Modern Japan* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–11, on Fukuzawa, pp. 40–63, and on Taguchi and the *Tokyo keizai zasshi*, pp. 85–97. On Mori Arinori, see Nagai Michio, *Higher Education in Japan: Its Take-off and Crash*, trans. Jerry Dusenbury (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1971), pp. 166–196.

<sup>24</sup> Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salary Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 9–43; Douglas R. Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 31–60. On the persistent influence of conventional morality in the popular consciousness of the Meiji era, see Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, trans. and ed. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 151–195.



This “Japanese Enlightenment,” Kenneth Pyle argues, was a blueprint for a “wholly Western, liberal, democratic, and industrial society.”<sup>25</sup>

As is suggested by the encounter, adaptation, and then abandonment of the radical liberal blueprint for “Westernization” by prominent members of the *Meiropokusha*, it is most doubtful that such a mélange of mid-century liberal theory, and the deterministic histories derived from it, provided any basis for positive state action beyond an associative night-watchman state. Indeed, liberalism of the kind proposed by Mill and others was premised on notions of individuality that were decidedly Romantic and in many respects hostile reactions to the excesses of enlightened absolutism, the French revolutionary state, and Napoleon.<sup>26</sup> This liberalism was basically hostile to the power of the modern state, and, as such, an ideology hardly suited to the task of building one, for at its core lay the very denial of the state and policy.<sup>27</sup> As in the modification and gradual abandonment of this variant of liberalism, Stefan Tanaka has shown that the shift away from “enlightenment history” was a product of that history’s failure to accommodate Japan, it having “consigned Japan to be a perpetually incomplete version of the West.”<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Pyle has nevertheless derived from the *Bunmeikaika* (and by implication, from mid nineteenth-century liberal theory) a standard of liberalism against which subsequent Japanese developments have been measured, deviations from which he has pejoratively defined as being “conservative.”<sup>29</sup>

A comparative perspective raises additional questions about this liberal benchmark for Japan. Holding early Japanese *Bunmeikaika* up to nineteenth-century America yields some interesting conclusions. Not only were Americans deeply nativist, government policy was strongly protectionist. As it turns out, Americans were keen on state and local regulation and actively used state funds and credits to promote a range of commercial enterprises such as canals and railways.<sup>30</sup> It is revealing

<sup>25</sup> Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” p. 679.

<sup>26</sup> Mill, “On Liberty,” p. 58. Mill relies heavily on Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (1792). Similar themes are present in the works of the Swiss Romantic author Benjamin Constant (1767–1830), especially *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne* (1814).

<sup>27</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1932]), pp. 69–79.

<sup>28</sup> Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Past into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” pp. 676–679.

<sup>30</sup> Colleen Dunlavy, *Politics and Industrialization: Early Railroads in the United States and Prussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); William J. Novak, *The People's Wel-*

in this respect that the paragon of nineteenth-century economic nationalism, Friedrich List (1789–1846), drew his economic doctrines directly from American economic thinkers (specifically Alexander Hamilton [1755–1804], Henry Charles Carey [1793–1879], and Daniel Raymond [1786–1849]) and from economic policy precedents observed while in America—he became a U.S. citizen in 1825. These would be a major source of inspiration for his *National System of Political Economy* (1840), which, rather revealingly, grew out of an earlier piece called *Outlines of American Political Economy* (1827).<sup>31</sup> Henry Carey, the innovator of the “infant industry” argument justifying the protection of newly developing branches of American industry, was a fierce protectionist and isolationist, and, unlike List, one who enjoyed considerable political influence in his native land.<sup>32</sup>

Liberal theory and actual economic and social practice in mid century Britain also reveal sharp contrasts, and it is perhaps understandable that Mill’s 1859 paean to individual liberty would be made at a time when the momentum for social reform through regulatory state action had been well under way in Britain for a generation, evidenced by such landmark legislation as the Factory Acts (1833, amended 1844), Mines Act (1842), Joint Stock Companies Act (1844), Ten Hour Act (1847), Nuisance Removal Act (1847), Public Health Act (1848), and a broad swath of legislation on municipal public services, highways, and prisons in 1849. In the 1850s, factory regulations were tightened and extended twice (1850 and 1853), areas of commerce such as shipping came under strict legislative oversight (1854), and local authorities were granted wide powers in dealing with public health and safety threats generated by private property owners (1855). By 1860, a pattern of official intervention and regulation had been firmly established in Britain.

It would thus seem that some assessments of Meiji Japan are based on myths about American and British economic and social policy derived from a distinctive strand of mid nineteenth-century British lib-

---

fare: *Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); William G. Roy, *Socializing Capital: The Rise of Large Industrial Corporations in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> E. R. A. Seligman, “Economics in the United States: An Historical Sketch,” in *Essays in Economics* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 122–160, here 134–135; Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 34–35; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), pp. 504–505.

<sup>32</sup> Seligman, “Economics in the United States,” pp. 141–142.

eral social theory, not on actual policies and practices. As this reveals, the old liberal teleology and the double standards that motivated and justified the unequal treaties continue to inform Western historical assessments of Japan and definitions of “Meiji conservatism.”

#### THE POLITICAL CHANGE OF MEIJI 14 AND *DOITSUGAKU*

In the literature that links Japanese and German peculiarity, the political change of Meiji 14 (1881) is particularly important because it marks the rising influence of *Doitsugaku* (German studies) in Japan and an increasing orientation toward Germany for models in law, education, and economic and social policy. It is also central to the account of the rise of “Meiji conservatism” because of the consequently greater influence of German legal thinkers and social scientists on Japanese policy makers.<sup>33</sup>

Over the course of the 1870s, a “People’s Rights” movement (*Jiyūminken undō*) grew out of *Bunmeikaika*. This national political movement, through the new Liberal Party (*Jiyūtō*, formed in 1880), put pressure on the Imperial ministries and court to create representative political institutions. This, along with inflation, a squeeze on government finances, and scandal over plans to sell government assets, pressed finance minister Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), a partisan of Anglo-American liberal thought, to propose a constitution modeled on Britain. Under the sway of his secretary, Inoue Kowashi (1844–1895), Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), and others from the Satsuma-Chōshū samurai clans, who advocated a form of modernization that was less expressly “Western” and more Japanese, the emperor forced Ōkuma out of office in 1881 and promised a constitution in 1890. Itō and Inoue were drawn to the Prussian model for the constitution and to the German system of education, and it is notable that the fifth item of a new policy declared in November 1881 encouraged the study of German to overcome the dominance of French and English thought and thereby to create more “conservative minded men.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” pp. 698, 704–705; idem, “Advantages of Followership,” pp. 138–39. See also Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement*, pp. 71–72, 82–83. The political change of Meiji 14 is interpreted positively by George Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1869–1890* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Hirakawa Sukehiro, “Japan’s turn to the West,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, ed. Jansen, p. 494.

Japanese law and education would reflect these changes, and at face value it would seem that there is little ground to question that the interest in “German studies” (*Doitsugaku*) was motivated by “conservatism,” and by implication, that German models in law and education were conservative.

Nevertheless, the path that led to the adoption of German legal and constitutional patterns in Japan was circuitous, and its outcome was ambiguous. It also predated the “conservative turn” of Meiji 14 and the rise of *Doitsugaku*. Japanese interest in foreign law began with Japan’s coerced opening to the West and was born of a desire to find a legal basis for revising the hated unequal treaties. While the British and Americans had applied their case law method in drafting and enforcing those agreements, this was entirely irreconcilable with Japanese legal tradition and thus not adopted, despite strong Japanese orientation to these countries at the time. This fact, and the Meiji oligarchy’s desire to centralize power, resulted in early interest in the civil law tradition of continental Europe, and in particular, the Code Napoléon of France.<sup>35</sup> As the process of translating and adopting civil law advanced, tensions between the natural law concepts of the Code and Japanese legal traditions grew and came to a head over the abolition of samurai privileges, bringing the process of codifying a civil law along French lines to a standstill in 1878.<sup>36</sup> Around the same time, awareness developed that German legal and constitutional models afforded greater scope for the integration of Japanese norms, institutions, and notions of legitimate power, most notably a sovereign emperor.<sup>37</sup> These models were also broadly attractive as a legal foundation for positive state action directly relevant to the process of Japanese state building, which was more circumscribed in Western legal codes and constitutions informed by natural law concepts and Enlightenment social contract theory. France’s tumultuous political history (no fewer than three revolutions between 1830 and 1871) and the American Civil War had certainly also made these less attractive to the Japanese.

One of the first hired foreign advisors (*Oyatoi gaikokujin*) of the Japanese government from Germany was Hermann Roesler (1834–1894), who was initially employed to help draft Japanese commercial law. A conservative Catholic from Bavaria and a harsh critic of Bis-

---

<sup>35</sup> Paul Christian Schenck, *Der deutsche Anteil an der Gestaltung des modernen japanischen Rechts- und Verwaltungswesens. Deutsche Rechtsberater im Japan der Meiji-Zeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 89–97.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

<sup>37</sup> See here *ibid.*, pp. 130–142.

marck, Roesler drew heavily on the work of Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890).<sup>38</sup> Roesler argued that economic laws were not universal but instead depended on social institutions and the legal structure of a given society.<sup>39</sup> Crucially, this meant that a modern society was something more than the sum of commercial interests and that positive state action was needed to prevent the capture and use of state institutions by a predominant social class to further its own interests. Roesler's relevance for Japan was that his legal thought provided justifications for state policy that went beyond the defense of the negative liberties of individuals, and his ideas would prove influential in drafting the later Meiji constitution by Itō.

During what came to be known as the “German decade” (1881–1890), legal experts such as Roesler exercised considerable influence in Japanese law schools, universities, and legislative commissions.<sup>40</sup> The changed orientation in legal thinking was underscored by Itō Hirobumi's famous visit to Germany and Austria in 1882–1883, during which he engaged in discussions about potential constitutions with Rudolf von Gneist (1816–1895) in Berlin and Lorenz von Stein in Vienna.<sup>41</sup> Yet the most potent and adaptable justifications for an authoritarian constitutional order based on an imperial ideology were borrowed from the organicist theories of state developed by the Swiss legal scholar Johann Caspar Bluntschli (1808–1881). His relevance for the Meiji constitution was assured by the emperor's tutor and later rector of the Imperial University of Tokyo, Katō Hiroyuki (1836–1916), who had translated Bluntschli's *Allgemeines Staatsrecht* (2 vols., 1868) into Japanese.<sup>42</sup>

The Meiji constitution that gradually emerged from these various influences and consultations was hardly a slavish imitation of German and European models. Indeed, significant departures from German and

---

<sup>38</sup> On von Stein's thought, see Pasquale Pasquino, “Introduction to Lorenz von Stein,” *Economy and Society* 10 (February 1981): 1–6; Karl-Hermann Kästner, “From the Social Question to the Social State,” *Economy and Society* 10 (February 1981): 7–26; and Giles Pope, “The Political Ideas of Lorenz von Stein and their Influence on Rudolf Gneist and Gustav Schmoller” (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1985). On von Stein's influence in Japan, see Ernst Grünfeld, “Lorenz von Stein und Japan,” *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* 45 (Neue Folge 100) (1913): 345–361.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes Siemes, *Hermann Roesler and the Making of the Meiji State* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1966), pp. 3–7; see also Joseph Pittau, *Political Thought in Early Meiji Japan 1867–1889* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 131–157; and Schenck, *Der deutsche Anteil*, pp. 102–107, 132–135.

<sup>40</sup> Schenck, *Der deutsche Anteil*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>41</sup> See here esp. *ibid.*, pp. 143–164.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–197.

Western legal thinking can be seen, notably the persistent influence of Confucian traditions and genuinely Japanese innovations: a unitary family-state with a deified emperor at its head had no precedent in modern German or Western law, and the Japanese Diet was elected with a more restricted franchise and granted even fewer powers than its counterpart under the Prussian constitution.<sup>43</sup> Yet despite the authoritarian inclination of its drafters, the Meiji constitution was in practice quite flexible, and with its checks on imperial power, independent judiciary, formal legal equality, and guaranteed basic rights (including protection of private property), it was unquestionably modern. It was in fact highly praised and defended by most contemporary American and western European constitutional experts, just as it was criticized by Kaiser William II and a number of German conservatives.<sup>44</sup>

The foregoing discussion has tried to highlight the centrality of the historical contingencies that led to the adoption of certain German legal and constitutional models, the importance of Japanese tradition and innovative adaptation in that reception, and the need to prioritize actual outcomes over influences. It also clearly matters where the accents are placed in a historical reconstruction of German influences on Meiji Japan, and here the political and historical context is particularly relevant. Kenneth Pyle himself concedes that assessments of Meiji bureaucrats and their legal policies underwent a remarkable transformation during and after World War II. Before the war, the task of modernization during the Meiji era was, in the words of John Dower, beyond the task of a “half-awakened nation of merchants and peasants” and required the workings of “military bureaucrats . . . far in advance of the rest of their countrymen,” while during and after the war these same bureaucrats (now “calculating Metternichs”) had checked social and political freedom and robbed the Japanese people of a steadily rising standard of living.<sup>45</sup>

As historical circumstance seems to have determined this schizoid assessment of the Meiji leadership and its legal, economic, and social policies, it would thus seem imperative to reassess the “conservatism” of these policies, given that “liberalism,” as defined in the context of

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193, 200, 211–214, 225–226.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225–239. On the scope of the Meiji constitution afforded pluralism and local political participation in the Taishō era, see Sally Ann Hastings, *Neighborhood and Nation in Tokyo, 1905–1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995); and Hanes, *The City as Subject*.

<sup>45</sup> Dower, ed., *Origins of the Modern Japanese State*, pp. 23 and 153, quoted in Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” p. 718.

*Bunmeikaika*, was in essence the ideal of laissez-faire and radical Westernization along Anglo-American and French lines. From the beginning of the Meiji restoration, it had been an oligarchic regime of bureaucrats that had imposed liberalizing reforms on the Japanese population to eliminate vestiges of feudalism. In the process, elements of liberalism (economic liberty and civil equality) and extensive state action had been directly linked. This was not at all unlike the Prussian bureaucratic state between 1806 and 1848, which successfully pursued aggressive liberal economic and social reforms against a reluctant population precisely *because* it was unhindered by a constitution and representative institutions. It is revealing, for example, that protectionist policies in Prussia-Germany came into being only as a consequence of political democratization.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Pyle, following the interpretation of E. H. Norman, has argued that the Meiji Restoration was only “limited” because “it had not brought to power a wholly new class espousing a revolutionary set of values.”<sup>47</sup> Yet those who have questioned German peculiarity have problematized this very notion of a “failed” bourgeois revolution so central to the assessment of the supposedly “incomplete” Meiji restoration, one which necessarily conflates “liberal” and “bourgeois” with “democratic revolution.” As Blackbourn and Eley have argued, there is certainly no reason why the legal and institutional conditions necessary for modern industrial society (civil equality and economic freedoms) cannot be imposed from above without the extension of full democracy, as they were in both Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan.<sup>48</sup> This is a way of pointing out that the formation of bourgeois society, economic liberalization, and industrialization are not *necessarily* one-way streets to democracy, and, likewise, that undemocratic states are not *necessarily* conservative. In this light, “Meiji conservatism” as used by Pyle seems to be a slippery and somewhat misleading concept, referring more narrowly to weak representative institutions, limited individual and civil liberties, and bureaucratic opacity rather than to the specific content of Meiji legal, educational, and economic policy. As has been noted by Sheldon Garon, what is remarkable about modern Japan is the extent to which the state was

---

<sup>46</sup> Knut Borchert, “Protectionism in Historical Perspective,” in *Perspectives on Modern German Economic History and Policy*, trans. Peter Lambert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1–15, here 3–4.

<sup>47</sup> Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” p. 681.

<sup>48</sup> David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 84–85.

popularly identified as a progressive force and the degree to which individuals and groups with modernizing inclinations could cooperate with it.<sup>49</sup>

What about the impact of *Doitsugaku* in other areas, notably Japanese education policy? As in law, Japanese education reformers were initially drawn to the French model, which was, however, abandoned due to an alien curriculum, funding problems, and fierce popular opposition.<sup>50</sup> The American system adapted to replace it was even more short-lived.<sup>51</sup> American teachers and advisors working in Japan, such as Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) and David Murray (1830–1905), encouraged a more critical stance to things Western in general, particularly to English and American models in education. Murray, who was retained by the Meiji government as superintendent of education to advise on school reform, was a persistent proponent of a German-style compulsory education system with centralized, national administration and equality of educational opportunity against Minister of Education Tanaka Fujimaro's (1845–1909) plans for a decentralized American model without compulsory attendance requirements and a hands-off approach to private school supervision.<sup>52</sup> It should not come as a surprise that around the same time, German pedagogical models were in the ascendant in the United States no less than in Japan.<sup>53</sup>

Further evidence that Japanese borrowing from Germany was more than a deviant turn to "conservatism" is provided by a glance at higher

---

<sup>49</sup> Sheldon Garon, "Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (May 1994): 346–366, here 350. See also Sumiya Kazuhiko, "Überlegungen zum Prozeß der Industrialisierung und Modernisierung Japans und zur wissenschaftlichen Analyse," *Rikkyō keizai-gaku kinkyū* 43 (1990): 61–77.

<sup>50</sup> See Nagai Michio, "Westernization and Japanization: The Early Meiji Transformation of Education," in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 35–76, here 47–61.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61–68.

<sup>52</sup> Kaneko Tadashi, "Contributions of David Murray to the Modernization of School Administration in Japan," in *The Modernizers*, ed. Burks, pp. 301–321, here 313–318. Kaneko emphasizes a subsequent shift away from Murray's "Pestalozzian ideal" toward "moralistic and vigorous nation building" and "Prussian-style nationalism" in Japanese education under Itō, *ibid.*, p. 318. However, this assessment conveniently overlooks the fact that the leading Pestalozzian pedagogues from which Murray might have drawn his ideas for compulsory education were Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) and F. A. W. Diesterweg (1790–1866), both influential Prussian officials and education reformers. See also Makoto Aso and Ikuo Amano, *Education and Japan's Modernization* (n.p.: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1972), pp. 19–41.

<sup>53</sup> See esp. Karl-Heinz Günther, "Interdependence between Democratic Pedagogy in Germany and the Development of Education in the United States in the Nineteenth Century," in *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917*, ed. Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jürgen Herbst (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 43–56.



education.<sup>54</sup> In some ways, Japanese university policy was following trends already in evidence in medicine, which in Japan had been modeled on German practice since late Tokugawa times following Dutch advice reinforced by the Dutch-American advisor Guido Verbeek (1830–1898) and the German-Dutch physician Philip von Siebold (1796–1886). The prestige of German medical research and the work of numerous German doctors in Japan, most notably Erwin Bälz (1849–1913), culminated in the subsequent dominance of German medicine and German medical terminology in Japan.<sup>55</sup> German universities enjoyed great international prestige in the nineteenth century, one that drew students from all over the world and particularly the United States, which was still in the process of putting together an adequate system of higher education. Before 1890, American higher education was little more than a haphazard system of denominational colleges and finishing schools, places where rote memorization of watered-down and repackaged British economic classics, linked closely to theology and moral philosophy, was the extent of teaching in the social sciences.<sup>56</sup> This helps to explain why so many American graduate students of economics, political science, and law sought instruction abroad. German universities were the first choice, particularly for those who sought advanced degrees for university research and teaching. The University of Berlin, for example, enrolled some two hundred Americans in 1885, compared with only thirty at the Sorbonne, and between 1820 and 1920 no less than nine thousand Americans would attend university in Germany.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the French universities,

---

<sup>54</sup> On the development of Japanese universities, see Ulrich Teichler, *Geschichte und Struktur des japanischen Hochschulwesens* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1975). For a critical interpretation of this process, see Nagai, *Higher Education in Japan*; and Byron K. Marshall, *Academic Freedom and the Japanese Imperial University, 1868–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> See Hermann Heinrich Vianden, *Die Einführung der deutschen Medizin in Japan in der Meiji-Zeit*, Düsseldorf Arbeiten zur Geschichte der Medizin, no. 59 (Düsseldorf: Tritsch, 1985).

<sup>56</sup> See Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 43–60; Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 22–50; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 81. On the development of American research universities from German models, see Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of American Research Universities, 1900–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 3–20.

<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 1, 8–9; Konrad H. Jarausch, “American Students in Germany, 1815–1914: The Structure of German and U.S. Matriculants at Göttingen University,” in *German Influences*, ed. Geitz, Heideking, and Herbst, pp. 195–211.

focused as they were on the production of professional lawyers, doctors, and lycée instructors, the German universities had an intellectual reach and a reputation for scholarly excellence that spanned the arts and sciences, and unlike Oxford and Cambridge colleges, they were inexpensive, public, and secular institutions.<sup>58</sup> It is revealing that the cohort of American students trained in Germany in the 1870s and 1880s would be instrumental to the development of the modern American social science and history disciplines and their graduate schools, research seminars, professional organizations, and scholarly journals.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective, the reorientation of Japanese education toward Germany in the early 1880s seems neither particularly sinister nor exceptional.

### THE "GERMAN HISTORICAL SCHOOL" AND JAPAN

With the orientation of legal and educational policy to *Doitsugaku*, the "German Historical School of Economics" began to have an impact on the development of Japanese social science, as well as on the social and economic policy pursued by the Meiji government. As such, Kenneth Pyle has argued that this German school of thought was an important catalyst in the rise of Meiji "bureaucratic conservatism."<sup>60</sup> How-

<sup>58</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> Ross, *Origins of American Social Science*, pp. 53–97. Rodgers points out that Ross and others have not fully explored the German connection, *Atlantic Crossings*, pp. 77 and 527 n. 2; Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Henry W. Farnam, "Deutsch-amerikanische Beziehungen in der Volkswirtschaftslehre," in *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Volkswirtschaftslehre im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, ed. S. P. Altmann (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908), ch. 18; Albion W. Small, "Some Contributions to the History of Sociology, Section XIX. The Emergence of Sociology in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 30 (1924–1925): 310–36; Edwin R. A. Seligman, "Die Sozialökonomie in den Vereinigten Staaten," in *Die Wirtschaftswissenschaft nach dem Kriege. Festgabe für Lujo Brentano zum 80. Geburtstag*, vol. 2, eds. M. J. Bonn and M. Palyi (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1925), pp. 59–78; Herbst, *The German Historical School*, pp. 99–159. On the institutionalization of the historical discipline in the United States and France based on German models of scholarship, see especially Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio Macht Karriere. Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism," pp. 704–705; and in greater detail in idem, "Advantages of Followership," pp. 132–164. For a more balanced assessment, see Wolfgang Schwentker, "Fremde Gelehrte. Japanische Nationalökonomien und Sozialreformer im Kaiserreich," in *Intellektuelle im Deutschen Kaiserreich*, eds. Gangolf Hübinger and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), pp. 172–197.

ever, analyzing the specific content and lines of contact of this school of economics in Japan raises many questions that substantially qualify such associations. This becomes all the more apparent when Meiji Japan is viewed within a global, comparative perspective.

In Japanese social science, the orientation to German models was initially seen in policy toward the Imperial University of Tokyo through the activities of the *Doitsugaku kyōkai gakko* (School for German Science), founded by Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914, one of the earliest Japanese students of law in Germany), Nishi Amane (1829–1897), Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), and others in 1881.<sup>61</sup> As Yanagisawa has shown, a prodigious effort was made by the *Doitsugaku kyōkai gakko* to translate German economic and legal texts, among them the existing volumes of the older historical economist Wilhelm Roscher's (1817–1894) *System der Volkswirtschaft* (5 vols. 1854–1894). Of particular interest because of the desire to revise the unequal treaties with the West was Friedrich List, who was, interestingly, translated into Japanese not from the German original but from an English translation in 1889.<sup>62</sup> The acute financial and monetary problems of the Meiji government also led to the translation of numerous German and Austrian texts on public finance, among them those of Adolph Wagner (1835–1917), Lorenz von Stein, and Rudolf von Gneist.<sup>63</sup> Of equal importance, a faculty of law, economics, and political science (*Staatswissenschaften*) was organized at the University of Tokyo, along with the first scholarly society in political and economic science, the *Kokka gakkai* (founded in 1887), and its scholarly journal, the *Kokka gakkai zasshi*.<sup>64</sup> It was in the *Kokka gakkai zasshi* that translation of the works of the leading German historical economist, Gustav Schmoller (1838–1917), would be published.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to Hermann Roesler, a number of German academics in political economy and law were invited to teach in Japan, among them Paul Mayet (1846–1920), Georg Michaelis (1857–1936), Albert

---

<sup>61</sup> Yanagisawa Osamu, "Das Übersetzen von deutscher wirtschaftswissenschaftlicher Literatur vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Japan," in *Übersetzen, verstehen, Brücken bauen. Geisteswissenschaftliches und literarisches Übersetzen im internationalen Kulturaustausch*, ed. Paul Armin Frank et al. (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1993), pp. 393–404, here 395; On Aoki Shūzō, Nishi Amane, and Yamagata Aritomo in Europe, see esp. William G. Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travelers in America and Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Yanagisawa, "Das Übersetzen," p. 396.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

Mosse (1846–1925), and Karl Rathgen (1856–1921). A grandson of Barthold Niebuhr (1776–1831), Rathgen was a statistically and historically trained economist who had studied with Gustav Schmoller at Berlin University. Advising the Japanese government on monetary and financial policy and lecturing at the University of Tokyo for eight years (1882–1890), Rathgen developed a remarkable appreciation for this country, its culture, and the process of industrial development, and he would act as a sharp and highly informed critic of the “yellow peril” hysteria that swept the West in the 1890s.<sup>66</sup>

Rathgen, who was himself a political liberal and critic of European imperialism, introduced the writings of historical economists to his Japanese charges and encouraged a number of them to attend university in Germany. Those who took up study in Germany include Wadagaki Kenzō (1860–1919), Kanai Noburu (1865–1933), Kuwata Kumazō (1868–1932), Takano Iwasaburō (1871–1949), Seki Hajime (1873–1935), Fukuda Tokuzō (1874–1930), and Kawakami Hajime (1879–1946).<sup>67</sup> Kanai and Kuwata were students of Gustav Schmoller (as well as of Schmoller’s colleague, Adolph Wagner).<sup>68</sup> Fukuda and Takano were students of that other great German historical economist, Lujo Brentano (1844–1931). Under the supervision of these German teachers, this generation of Japanese economists honed their empirical research skills and developed a keen interest in social reform. Kanai Noburu spent 1888–1889 at the University of Berlin. He was very warmly received and mentored by Schmoller, and it was through this contact (both in the lecture hall and in Schmoller’s home) that Kanai developed his interest in social questions.<sup>69</sup> A letter written by

<sup>66</sup> Karl Rathgen, *Die Japaner und ihre Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1905). On his career in Japan, see Willy Kraus, “Karl Rathgen in Tokyo,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 13 (1989): 233–257. It is a testament to the accuracy of Rathgen’s observations of Japanese industrialization that recent scholarship has affirmed them, notably that the Meiji Japanese economy was dominated by small firms and that its capitalist development was endogenous. See here Distelrath, *Die japanische Produktionsweise*, p. 158; David L. Howell, *Capitalism from Within: Economy, Society and State in a Japanese Fishery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Luke S. Roberts, *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th-Century Tosa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> This also includes Oda Hajime (1864–1918), Tajima Kinji (1867–1934), Yamazaki Kakujirō (1868–1945), Yahagi Eizō (1870–1933), Onozuka Kiheiiji (1870–1944), Katō Haruhiko (1870–1944), and Uchida Ginzō (1872–1919). A younger generation trained in Germany includes Arisawa Hiromi (1896–1988), Nakayama Ichirō (1898–1981), and Tohata Seiichi (1899–1983).

<sup>68</sup> On Kanai, see Kawai Eijirō, *Kanai Noburu no shōgai to gakusei* (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1939); on his university politics at the University of Tokyo, see Marshall, *Academic Freedom*, pp. 17, 51, 93, 101–102, 104–105, 111.

<sup>69</sup> Schwentker, “Fremde Gelehrte,” p. 180.

Kanai to Gustav Schmoller shortly after leaving Germany for a year in England to study social conditions nicely illustrates this:

I want to thank you again for your personal kindness and your good instruction in economic science. Since leaving Germany things have gone well for me. I am now living in London NW, . . . and am doing my best to get to know English social and economic conditions. I have not yet begun the scholarly study in a strict sense; but I have already seen some welfare institutions, such as for example the “Homes” of Dr. Barnardo,<sup>70</sup> and am very interested in them. I have also occupied myself somewhat with the question of the “great strikes of the dock-laborers.” But my newest hope is to visit “Toynbee Hall” in memory of the deceased English economist Toynbee<sup>71</sup> and to get to know it more thoroughly than I now do. If you could occasionally give me written advice regarding such investigations, I would be very grateful.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly, the impulses given in Schmoller’s seminar for empirical investigation of economic and social conditions proved fruitful. Another letter to Schmoller, written one year later from Saigon on the way back to Japan, reported the completion of his study of the “social question in England” and his departure from “the land of classical economics” for Japan, where he intended to begin an academic career “combined with another bureaucratic activity which is unfortunately necessary for our young men in most cases.” He wrote that he regretted that his first economics teacher, Dr. Rathgen, was no longer in Japan.<sup>73</sup> The observations Kanai made of poor relief in London reinforced a conviction that urban poverty and deprivation would not be remedied if left to a policy of *laissez-faire*; the state had an obligation to intervene.<sup>74</sup>

A similar intellectual relationship developed between Brentano and Fukuda. The dissertation Fukuda completed under Brentano’s supervision at the University of Munich in 1899 was remarkable for being the very first systematic, scholarly analysis of Japan’s social and economic history, and it was accordingly published in a prestigious

---

<sup>70</sup> Thomas John Barnardo (1845–1905), physician, philanthropist, and pioneer in social work who founded homes for destitute children in London’s East End.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold Toynbee (1852–1883), English economist and sociologist, founder of the social settlement movement in Whitechapel district, London, the site of Toynbee Hall erected in his honor in 1884, the first settlement house in the world.

<sup>72</sup> Kanai to Schmoller, 3 October 1889: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, VI. HA, Nachlass Gustav Schmoller, Nr. 182, Bl. 83.

<sup>73</sup> Kanai to Schmoller, 30 October 1890: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, VI. HA, Nachlass Schmoller, Nr. 183, Bl. 189.

<sup>74</sup> Schwentker, “Fremde Gelehrte,” p. 181.

German monograph series.<sup>75</sup> Like Kanai, Fukuda supplemented his studies with extensive field investigation of social and economic conditions throughout Germany, notably in the industrial Ruhr district, where he had opportunity to observe the factory welfare provisions of the giant Krupp steel works.<sup>76</sup> Upon his return to Japan, Fukuda and Brentano maintained a voluminous correspondence in German until Fukuda's death in 1930. It remains an unpublished and largely ignored resource that constitutes not only one of the best examples of how German social science was gradually adapted to Japanese conditions but also a remarkably candid and rich analysis of Japanese domestic and international affairs in the early twentieth century. Fukuda shared Brentano's methods and policy convictions, which combined an advocacy for social legislation with a firm commitment to free trade. As Fukuda would write Brentano in 1909, "All my Japanese output has its origins in the study of your writings . . . my lectures, my public speeches, newspaper articles, these all originate from you."<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the indiscriminate and reflexive use of the term "conservative" in referring to German social scientists influential in Meiji Japan has resulted in the erroneous labeling of Lujo Brentano as a "conservative social reformer" when in fact he was a passionate, life-long left-liberal.<sup>78</sup>

It was this first cohort of Japanese students in Germany, and particularly Kanai, who introduced the term "*shakai mondai*" (from German "*soziale Frage*," "social question") to Japan through a number of publications, *Shakai mondai* (1892) among them; Kanai, Kuwata, Fukuda, and others would also form and participate in the *Nihon shakai seisaku gakkai* (Japanese Social Policy Association) in 1896, modeled on the German *Verein für Sozialpolitik* of the same name founded by Gustav Schmoller, Lujo Brentano, and a number of their colleagues in 1873.<sup>79</sup> The economists around the *Shakai seisaku gakkai* were strong

---

<sup>75</sup> Tokuzo Fukuda, *Die gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Japan* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1900).

<sup>76</sup> Schwentker, "Fremde Gelehrte," p. 193.

<sup>77</sup> Fukuda to Brentano, 17 July 1909: Bundesarchiv Koblenz, 1001 Nachlass Brentano, Nr. 76, Bl. 92–96.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Duus and Irwin Scheiner, "Socialism, Liberalism, and Marxism 1901–1931," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, ed. Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 654–710, here 658; cf. James J. Sheehan, *The Career of Lujo Brentano: A Study of Liberalism and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>79</sup> Sumiya Etsuji, *Nihon keizaigakushi* (Kyoto: Minerva, 1958), pp. 151–198, 250–290; Iida Kanae, "Nihon shakai seisaku gakkai to keizaigaku kinkyū," in *Nihon no keizaigaku: Nihonjin no keizaiteki shisui no kiseki*, ed. Takaynagi Hiroshi (Tokyo: Tōyō keizai shimpō-sha, 1984), pp. 51–92; Schwentker, "Fremde Gelehrte," pp. 177–190; Pyle, "Advantages of

proponents of social legislation and advocated strengthening the state against *Bunmeikaika* economic liberals such as Taguchi Ukichi and other proponents of *laissez-faire*. Yet the range of the scholarship influenced by German training in economics was wide, and it spanned the political spectrum, often defying easy categorization. It included the trade unionism and social democracy of Takano, the revisionist Marxism of Kawakami, Takano, and Kawakami's extensive early involvement with the Ohara Institute in systematic collection of social statistics, and the development of a vibrant Japanese tradition of Weberian sociology.<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Hanes has shown the powerful impulses given to Japanese progressivism and urban reform by German social scientists (particularly Gustav Schmoller and Adolph Wagner) in his intellectual biography of Seki Hajime.<sup>81</sup>

Kanai and Kuwata would exercise considerable influence on the Japanese bureaucracy as professors at Tokyo University, and in Pyle's estimation, they would be key to the emergence of "bureaucratic conservatism" marked by an anticipatory social policy "from above." This included the development of factory paternalism (and thus welfare corporatism), the Local Improvement Movement (*chihō kairyō undō*), which encouraged agricultural cooperatives and integrated local into national administration, thereby mobilizing local support for nationalism and imperialism, and the prevention of socialist thought through school indoctrination (*shisō zendō*). They were also intellectual fathers of the Factory Act of 1911, and a broad swath of social insurance,

---

Followership," pp. 139–148. For brief discussions of Kanai and Kuwata in English, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *A History of Japanese Economic Thought* (London: Routledge 1989), pp. 62–70; and Sugiyama, *Origins of Economic Thought*, pp. 11–19.

<sup>80</sup> On Fukuda, see Tomotsu Nishizawa, "Lujo Brentano, Alfred Marshall, and Tokuzo Fukuda: The Reception and Transformation of the German Historical School in Japan," in *The German Historical School: The Historical and Ethical Approach to Economics*, ed. Yuichi Shionoya (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 155–172. On Kawakami, see Gail Lee Bernstein, *Japanese Marxist: A Portrait of Kawakami Hajime, 1879–1946* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press., 1976). On Takano, Kawakami, and the Ohara Institute, see Wada Tsuyoshi, "Ohara Magosaburō, Takano Iwasaburō, Kawakami Hajime—Ohara shakai mondai kinkyū jo wo meguru shisō danshō," *Keizai to keizaigaku* 82 (February 1997): 1–15; Wada Tsuyoshi, "Shoki Takano Iwasaburō no kōgyō keizairon—Fukuoka kōen (1918) wo chūshin ni," *Keizai to keizaigaku* 81 (July 1996): 109–131; Marshall, *Academic Freedom*, pp. 99–105. On the interwar period, see Osamu Yanagisawa, "The Impact of German Economic Thought on Japanese Economists before World War II," in *The German Historical School*, ed. Shionoya, pp. 173–187. On the development of Weberian sociology in Japan, see Wolfgang Schwentker, *Max Weber in Japan. Eine Untersuchung zur Wirkungsgeschichte 1905–1995* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); and Wolfgang Mommsen and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds., *Max Weber und das moderne Japan* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), esp. pp. 301–415.

<sup>81</sup> Hanes, *The City as Subject*, pp. 37, 49–50, 116–117.

labor, and factory legislation passed in the 1920s, including the Labor Exchange Law of 1921, the Health Insurance Law of 1922, minimum age requirements for dangerous professions, and the revised Factory Law (1926), improving worker benefits. According to Pyle, all such policies fostered a collectivist ethic destructive to pluralism and democracy and contributed in time to Japanese authoritarianism.<sup>82</sup>

Since the “German Historical School,” and Gustav Schmoller in particular, seem to bear a burden of guilt for the rise of this “Meiji bureaucratic conservatism” through their influence on Kanai and Kuwata, it is imperative that both are given some illumination before Pyle’s assertions about “Meiji bureaucratic conservatism” and its anticipatory social policy can be tested. “The German Historical School” is a much-abused rubric of the history of economic thought. It has been conventional to paint it as a cohesive group of German economists centered on Gustav Schmoller who were hostile to the cosmopolitan liberalism of classical economics, and who, drawing on Romantic, historicist, and Hegelian idealist traditions, rejected Enlightenment thought and promoted economic nationalism and neomercantilism.<sup>83</sup>

It is very hard to generalize about the “Historical School” because of the heterogeneity of the people involved, and the caricature that results from drawing out common themes is often more misleading than instructive.<sup>84</sup> Historical economists hardly formed a coherent “school” in any sense of the term. As with other German academics in sister disciplines, these scholars were a contentious lot, and the aware-

---

<sup>82</sup> Pyle, “Advantages of Followership,” pp. 148–164; Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” pp. 704–720; on the Local Improvement Movement see Pyle, “The Technology of Japanese Nationalism.” A similarly negative but more nuanced interpretation of some of these and other Taishō initiatives is given by Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Pre-war Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 127–131; Gregory J. Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Kasza, *The Conscripted Society: Administered Mass Movements* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 18–19, 87–99, 136–37, 161–165. For a more positive assessment, see esp. Hastings, *Neighborhood and Nation in Tokyo*; and Hanes, *The City as Subject*.

<sup>83</sup> H. K. Betz, “How Does the German Historical School Fit?” *History of Political Economy* 20 (1988): 409–430; Karl Pribram, *A History of Economic Reasoning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 209–244. Pribram and Betz stress the importance of German romanticism and idealism in the development of the German Historical School. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, pp. 808–819; Henry William Spiegel, *The Growth of Economic Thought* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971), pp. 411–433. Spiegel calls the Historical School a “Hegelian variant” of economics.

<sup>84</sup> On this problem see Erik Grimmer-Solem and Roberto Romani, “The Historical School, 1870–1900: A Cross National Reassessment,” *History of European Ideas* 24 (1998): 267–299, here esp. 267–276; and Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. 19–34.



ness of the historically situated nature of social and economic reality was too ubiquitous within the German economics profession to make this a meaningful criteria for a “school.”<sup>85</sup> Of those who specifically employed history as an economic tool (Adolph Wagner did not, and so must be excluded), the names that stand out (in addition to Schmoller, Brentano, and Rathgen), are Karl Bücher (1847–1930), Adolf Held (1844–1880), Georg Friedrich Knapp (1842–1926), Wilhelm Lexis (1837–1914), and Gustav von Schönberg (1839–1908).<sup>86</sup> One common theme bringing this generation of scholars together was extensive use of statistics and an intense ethical orientation and interest in social reform and welfare policy, the latter a passion born of the fissures in the newly unified German Reich. This enduring interest in social questions motivated the founding of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, which was simultaneously a pressure group and economic research institute.<sup>87</sup>

If Gustav Schmoller is taken as the paragon of the “School,” clichés about it fall away rapidly. He rejected Romanticism and an organic

<sup>85</sup> David F. Lindenfeld, “The Myth of the Older Historical School of Economics,” *Central European History* 26 (1993): 405–416; Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 151–152, 233–239; Heath Pearson, “Was There Really a German Historical School of Economics?” *History of Political Economy* 31 (1999): 547–562. See also Peter Koslowski, Heino Heinrich Nau, and Betram Schefold, eds., *The Historicity of Economics: Continuities and Discontinuities of Historical Thought in the 19th and 20th Century Economics* (Berlin: Springer, 2002).

<sup>86</sup> Lesser figures include Siegmund Adler (1853–1920), Gustav Cohn (1840–1919), Karl von Ebergh (1855–1941), Eberhard Gothein (1853–1923), Wilhelm Hasbach (1849–1920), Heinrich Herkner (1863–1932), Ignaz Jastrow (1856–1937), August von Miaskowski (1838–1899), Karl Oldenberg (1864–1936), August Sartorius von Waltershausen (1852–1938), Georg von Schanz (1853–1931), Max Sering (1857–1939), Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz (1864–1943), and Wilhelm Stieda (1852–1933).

<sup>87</sup> Erik Grimmer-Solem and Roberto Romani, “In Search of Full Empirical Reality: Historical Political Economy, 1870–1900,” *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 6 (Autumn 1999): 333–364. For literature on the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* in English, see Abraham Ascher, “Professors as Propagandists: The Politics of the Kathedersozialisten,” *Journal of Central European Affairs* 23 (October 1963): 282–302; Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics*, pp. 67–72, 171–202; Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination*, pp. 223–233; Anthony Oberschall, *Empirical Social Research in Germany 1848–1914* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1965); and Albion W. Small, “Some Contributions to the History of Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology* 29 (1923–1924): 707–725. In German, see Franz Boese, “Geschichte des Vereins für Sozialpolitik 1872–1939,” *Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik* 188 (1939); Irmela Gorges, *Sozialforschung in Deutschland 1872–1914. Gesellschaftliche Einflüsse auf Themen und Methodenwahl des Vereins für Sozialpolitik*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hein, 1986); Dieter Lindenlaub, “Richtungskämpfe im Verein für Sozialpolitik: Wissenschaft und Sozialpolitik im Kaiserreich vornehmlich vom Beginn des ‘Neuen Kurses’ bis zum Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges (1890–1914),” in *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Beiheft 52 (1967); Ulla G. Schäfer, *Historische Nationalökonomie und Sozialstatistik als Gesellschaftswissenschaften* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1971).

view of the state and society as unscientific obscurantism, and he had little time for Hegel, or much else apart from his statistical and historical research on the social question that he worked at ceaselessly throughout his career, leaving an oeuvre of some thirty books and pamphlets and almost two hundred articles.<sup>88</sup> Schmoller was not trained by, and did not much care for, the older historical economists such as Wilhelm Roscher; his leading mentor was in fact his uncle, the Swabian statistician Gustav Rümelin (1815–1888).<sup>89</sup> Schmoller's method is best described as simultaneously empirical (historical and statistical) and ethical.<sup>90</sup> While he did reject what he considered the naïve cosmopolitanism of many Enlightenment thinkers, he admired Adam Smith, especially his moral philosophy in the *Theory on Moral Sentiments* (1759), which he said made the greatest and most lasting impression on him of any book he had read.<sup>91</sup> Deeply concerned with moral philosophy and psychology as he was, he opposed the simplistic Ricardian-Malthusian dismal science and utilitarianism. These he excoriated for having wrongly shackled society to inexorable population, rent, and wage laws, and through its vulgarization by the Manchester Anti-Corn Law League, Cobden Club, and school primers, had blinded the public to appalling social conditions, encouraging a dogmatic adherence to laissez-faire in economic and social policy.<sup>92</sup> For Schmoller, the scientific improvement of economics through statistics and history and the betterment of society therefore went hand-in-hand.

Schmoller had an evolutionary historical telos taken up from Her-

---

<sup>88</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Lorenz Stein," *Preussische Jahrbücher* 19 (1867): 245–270, here 267; Schmoller, "Menger und Dilthey. Zur Methodologie der Staats- und Sozialwissenschaften," *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reiche (JbfGVV)* 7 (1883): 975–994, here 984–986. These figures are my own.

<sup>89</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Gustav Rümelin. Ein Lebensabriss des schwäbischen Staatsmannes, Statistikers und Sozialphilosophen," *JbfGVV* 31 (1907): 1469–1526.

<sup>90</sup> The best statement of his own methodology is Gustav Schmoller, "Volkswirtschaft, Volkswirtschaftslehre und -methode," in *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, ed. J. Conrad et al., vol. 8 (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1911), pp. 426–501. In English, see Heino Heinrich Nau, "Gustav Schmoller's Historico-Ethical Political Economy: Ethics, Politics and Economics in the Younger German Historical School, 1860–1917," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 7 (2000): 507–531.

<sup>91</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Adam Smith," *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* (1907): cols. 327–336 and 373–378, here 333.

<sup>92</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Über einige Grundfragen des Rechts und der Volkswirtschaft [1874–1875]," in *Über einige Grundfragen der Sozialpolitik und der Volkswirtschaftslehre* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1898), pp. 1–211; Schmoller, "Die Gerechtigkeit in der Volkswirtschaft," *JbfGVV* 5 (1881): 18–54. This last piece was translated as "The Idea of Justice in Political Economy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 4 (1894): 697–737.

bert Spencer, yet this was shorn of Spencer's Darwinian biologism.<sup>93</sup> Because of his commitment to historical complexity, this history had no predetermined trajectory; development varied and was determined by the state, institutions, law, ethics, and psychology of a particular people.<sup>94</sup> Schmoller was an intensely practical thinker open to remedying social problems by a wide variety of means, whether through cooperatives, insurance funds, factory legislation, restricted working hours, arbitration boards, codetermination schemes, cartel regulation, progressive taxes, or land reforms. It is also revealing that he was criticized by reactionaries, industrialists, liberals, and socialists alike.<sup>95</sup> Schmoller was a constitutional monarchist who believed the bureaucracy could be a force for good against vested agrarian and industrial interests; yet, while skeptical of democratic government, his ultimate aim throughout his career was to create a vibrant, middle-class civil society that included the working classes—a *Mittelstandsgesellschaft*, as he called it.<sup>96</sup>

It would be wrong to play down Schmoller's nationalism and imperialism, yet here, as in the case of Meiji Japan, perspective must be maintained.<sup>97</sup> Such attitudes were conventional to nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European and American academics and reformers, particularly liberal ones. More importantly, the vernacular of nationalism was enlisted by Schmoller to stake out a middle path between the extremes of liberalism and socialism, a path that was at the same time both humane and undeniably modern. Compared to

---

<sup>93</sup> Ernst Troeltsch recognized the affinities with Herbert Spencer in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, vol. 3 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Tübingen: Mohr, 1922), p. 432.

<sup>94</sup> Gustav Schmoller, *Grundriß der allgemeinen Volkswirtschaftslehre*, vol. 2 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1920), pp. 747–775.

<sup>95</sup> A perspective of the range of his economic and social policy activity and the controversies this generated can be gained through two collections: Gustav Schmoller, *Zur Social- und Gewerbepolitik der Gegenwart. Reden und Aufsätze* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1890); and Lucie Schmoller, ed., *Zwanzig Jahre Deutscher Politik (1897–1917). Aufsätze und Vorträge von Gustav Schmoller* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1920). It is interesting to note that the reactionary *Kreuz-Zeitung* singled Schmoller out for attack because he was an unabashed advocate of industrial progress. See for example *Neue Preussische (Kreuz) Zeitung*, 3 July 1903.

<sup>96</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Was verstehen wir unter dem Mittelstande? Hat er im 19. Jahrhundert zu- oder abgenommen?" in *Verhandlungen des Achten Evangelisch-Sozialen Kongresses. Abgehalten zu Leipzig am 10. und 11. 6. 1897* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897), pp. 132–161.

<sup>97</sup> On Schmoller's imperialism, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, "Imperialist Socialism of the Chair: Gustav Schmoller and German Weltpolitik, 1897–1905," in *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley and James Retallack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 106–122.

the often shrill and more earnest nationalism of younger colleagues such as Max Weber (1864–1920) and Werner Sombart (1863–1941), or state socialists such as Adolph Wagner, Schmoller's voice was decidedly moderate.<sup>98</sup> Here it is instructive to first glance at Britain and especially the United States during these same years before drawing conclusions about either Schmoller or his Japanese students and their "Meiji bureaucratic conservatism."

#### THE INTERNATIONAL TWILIGHT OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LIBERALISM

As already noted with reference to the *Bunmeikaika* in Japan, mid century British liberalism as represented by John Stuart Mill, Samuel Smiles, and Herbert Spencer was in vogue among the early Japanese modernizers. Yet as was mentioned in the case of the United States and Britain, the liberal ideal of laissez-faire remained just that: an ideal. In Britain, an intellectual movement against laissez-faire was under way very early, begun by Richard Jones (1790–1855) and William Whewell (1794–1866). This was later spearheaded by J. K. Ingram (1823–1907), J. E. Thorold Rogers (1823–1890), and John Stuart Mill's "wayward disciples" John Elliot Cairnes (1823–1875), Frederic Harrison (1831–1923), and T. E. Cliffe Leslie (1827–1882), as well as by Arnold Toynbee (1852–1883) and William Ashley (1860–1920) in Oxford (later also at Harvard) and William Cunningham (1849–1919) in Cambridge. These various impulses paved the way toward the New Liberalism of Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), the tariff reform imperialism of W. A. S. Hewins (1865–1931), and the Fabianism of Beatrice Webb (1858–1943) and Sidney Webb (1859–1947) later in the century.<sup>99</sup> It

<sup>98</sup> Max Weber, *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik: Akademische Antrittsrede* (Freiburg i. Br.: J. C. B. Mohr, 1895); Werner Sombart, *Händler und Helden. Patriotische Besinnungen* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1915); Adolph Wagner, *Vom Territorialstaat zur Weltmacht* (Berlin: n.p., 1900).

<sup>99</sup> Alon Kadish, *Apostle Arnold: The Life and Death of Arnold Toynbee* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986); Kadish, *Historians, Economists and Economic History* (London: Routledge, 1989). G. M. Koot, *English Historical Economics, 1870–1926: The Rise of Economic History and Neomercantilism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Koot, "T. E. Cliffe Leslie, Irish Social Reform, and the Origins of the English Historical School of Economics," in *James Wilson (1805–1860), Isaac Butt (1813–1879), T. E. Cliffe Leslie (1827–1882)*, ed. Mark Blaug, Elgar Reference Collection Series, *Pioneers in Economics*, vol. 22 (Aldershot: Elgar, 1991), pp. 92–116; Gregory C. G. Moore, "T. E. Cliffe Leslie and the English Methodenstreit," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 17 (Spring 1995): 57–77.

needs to be emphasized that these various British intellectual movements were largely indigenous in origin—Ingram, Leslie, Rogers, and Harrison were, in fact, an important stimulus to German trade unionism and early social reform, just as Barnardo, Toynbee, and Charles Booth's (1840–1916) *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1891–1903) were important influences for Japanese scholars such as Kanai, Fukuda, and their German counterparts. That said, there is little question that German precedents in social science higher education and social policy exercised a reciprocal influence, as in the creation of the London School of Economics by the Webbs and Hewins for example, or in the social insurance legislation of David Lloyd George.<sup>100</sup> Similar social reforming movements were in evidence in France and Italy.<sup>101</sup> American thinkers, too, would come to question the ideal of *laissez-faire* in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, marking the rise of the Progressive movement. Thus the appeal of the ideal of *laissez-faire* liberalism was fading rapidly in the West just as the Meiji leadership was orienting Japan toward *Doitsugaku*.

The international twilight of *laissez-faire* liberalism already underway in Britain and Germany and spreading to America and Japan had less to do with Schmoller and much more with the fact that industrialization and rapid urbanization posed similar challenges in America and Europe. Places such as Essen, Manchester, Lille, Pittsburgh, and Osaka were not only similar, they were also part of a rapidly growing, increasingly integrated world market. As Daniel Rodgers has argued, by the late nineteenth century “what struck those who traversed the industrial regions of the Old and New Worlds was not their difference but their extraordinary sameness.”<sup>102</sup> With that sameness came common problems: scarce or inadequate housing, large-scale migrations of people, structural and cyclical mass unemployment, industrial accidents and sudden indigence, inadequate public transport and utilities, chaotic urban building, pollution, toxins, and the new diseases they generated, as well as massive trusts and monopolies. In short, what emerged was a clash between the individual rights of private property and public welfare. Associative liberalism, focused as it was on the defense of private property and negative individual liberties, was

---

<sup>100</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1–71; E. P. Hennock, *British Social Reform and German Precedents: The Case of Social Insurance 1880–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>101</sup> See Grimmer-Solem and Romani, “The Historical School,” pp. 276–289.

<sup>102</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, p. 44.

revealing its limits everywhere. The liberal maxims in defense of private liberty frequently meant compromising public health and welfare, and in effect creating unfreedom. With that realization came a challenge to the notion of national exceptionalism. In America, for example, it led to the realization by an increasingly open-minded, less nativist, educated middle class (enabled by cheaper transatlantic transport) that Europe, particularly Britain and Germany, had managed this transformation more effectively and creatively, fueling a growing identification of Europe as a model of effective ways to reconcile private and public interests.<sup>103</sup> As Rodgers has put it, it was “an act of recoil against the disordered, violent camping expedition that was the United States,” reflecting what European observers had seen: “a country on the run, too busy with its private affairs to bother knitting its pieces together, tossing its cast-off goods wherever they might land, scamping public life in its drive to release individual energy.”<sup>104</sup> An acute awareness of American “backwardness” consequently set in.

In the creation of a transatlantic community of progressive reformism, many institutions played a role—the American Bureau of Labor, the social gospel, settlement house and civil service reform movements, international conferences, liberal and progressive journals, packaged tours—but the first and most important line of contact was the American experience of study in Germany, and particularly with historical economists such as Gustav Schmoller and other social reforming scholars critical of laissez-faire liberalism. Some of the leading American Progressives trained by German historical economists were Henry C. Adams (1851–1921), W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963, perhaps Schmoller’s most famous American student), Richard T. Ely (1854–1943, cofounder of the American Economic Association), and Albion W. Small (1854–1926, the first professor of sociology in the United States [University of Chicago]);<sup>105</sup> as Jurgen Herbst has suggested, German

<sup>103</sup> Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), pp. 11–15.

<sup>104</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, pp. 42–43.

<sup>105</sup> See Seligman, “Die Sozialökonomie,” pp. 59–78; Thomas Boston, “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Historical School of Economics,” *American Economic Review* 81 (May 1991): 303–306; David L. Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois—Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: H. Holt, 1993), pp. 137, 142–146; Benjamin G. Rader, *The Academic Mind and Reform: The Influence of Richard T. Ely in American Life* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966); Harry Elmer Barnes, *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 766–792; Andrew Abbott, *Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at One Hundred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 80–103.

historical economics was a formative influence on the development of the ethical relativism in John Dewey's (1859–1952) pragmatism and Herbert Croly's (1869–1930) progressive New Nationalism, which had some influence on Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>106</sup> As Rodgers concludes:

The German university connection opened the transatlantic “moment” in American social politics. Into the American context its alumni brought a sense of enormous release from the tightly bounded intellectual worlds of their youth—not least the tightly, syllogistically packaged intellectual paradigms of *laissez-faire*. They brought back new political ambitions and models of authority. They brought back an acute sense of a missing “social” strand in American politics and a new sense, as unnerving as it was attractive, of the social possibilities of the state.<sup>107</sup>

Progressivism was not only a genuine challenge to *laissez-faire*, but also a challenge to the rights-orientated liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill, as professed by the early Japanese champions of *Bunmeikaika*. Yet we should resist the misleading notion of progressivism necessarily representing “authoritarian socialism,” particularly when such tropes are employed in defense of the myth of American exceptionalism.<sup>108</sup> Recent reassessments of the relationship between German social science and American progressivism have questioned the notion that progressive reform merely sought to reimpose a nineteenth-century morality, was nakedly statist, repressive, and driven solely by economic interests to bolster the capitalist order, or that progressivism represented bureaucratization by elites for efficiency and a rational social order. Indeed, the ethical concerns driving these movements have been reasserted, particularly a belief in the duty to consciously and deliberately shape the world to achieve the social integration of increasingly heterogeneous and polarized populations and in identifying and defending a public interest that transcended the rights of private property owners.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Herbst, *The German Historical School*, pp. 157–159, 196–201. On Croly, see Edward A. Stettner, *Shaping Modern Liberalism: Herbert Croly and Progressive Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

<sup>107</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, p. 111.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). See also Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1956).

<sup>109</sup> Schäfer, *American Progressives*, pp. 15–23; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, pp. 76–111. See also James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

## THE WELFARE STATE

In light of what has been said so far, the Japanese-German connection in law, higher education, and the “Historical School” is much less peculiar—indeed, Meiji policy would appear very much in line with international currents. But what about the welfare state? Pyle has argued that the anticipatory social policy encouraged by Kanai and Kuwata bolstered collectivism and undermined pluralism and democracy. Here it is important to emphasize that Pyle’s evaluation of Meiji conservatism relies heavily on an interpretation of the German welfare state current in the 1960s and 1970s, which saw this as part and parcel of Germany’s own peculiar and pathological historical course (*Sonderweg*).<sup>110</sup> Specifically, government action to create a welfare state in Germany was not driven by humanitarian motives but was instead a policy of repression against the Social Democrats at a time of heightened industrial competition between nations. Bismarck’s policy, according to this view, was a paternalistic one, combatting “revolutionary socialism” with “state socialism” (social insurance schemes and “elaborate regulations of the conditions of labor”) to take the wind out of the sails of a movement seeking betterment through political radicalism.<sup>111</sup> As Pyle writes with reference to Japanese social policy, the consequences were dire:

This conservative strategy of early establishing institutions and an ideology to cope with social problems helped Japan avoid some of the horrors to which the industrial revolution gave rise in England—but it had its price. Ralf Dahrendorf, reflecting on the German experience, wrote that an ‘early social policy serves to prevent rather than to promote the reality of the citizen role’ and that ‘social policy always went too far in holding citizens in tutelage.’ In Japan, too, the bureaucratic strategy weakened support for parliamentary politics and for open confrontation or competing ideas and interests. A premium was placed on national unity.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>110</sup> For example, Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, pp. 30–45, 58, 70–71, 161, 172; and Wehler, *The German Empire*, pp. 131–137.

<sup>111</sup> Pyle, “Advantages of Followership,” p. 132.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*; Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” p. 720; Pyle quotes Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, pp. 70–71. In the original source for this chapter, Pyle wrote: “In Japan, too, propagation of the collectivist ethic, which was devised to ease the tensions of society, tended to weaken support for parliamentary politics and for open confrontation of competing interests.” “Advantages of Followership,” p. 163.



Pyle thus explicitly extends Dahrendorf's interpretations of the political implications of the welfare state from Germany to Japan, specifically that the welfare state hindered the development of pluralistic interest politics and a healthy, democratic civil society. So, how true is this of the welfare state in the German case?

Dahrendorf's assessment of the German welfare state has come under critical reexamination as a consequence of a vast body of research and the meticulous publication of government papers and correspondences.<sup>113</sup> It is now known, for example, that the idea that social insurance laws were "state socialism" representing a Prussian alternative to radical socialism is a myth that the radical right concocted during the Weimar Republic.<sup>114</sup> It is also known that German social insurance was not intended as a struggle against socialism but instead grew out of public and bureaucratic pressure to remedy inadequate factory safety through stricter company liability and a factory inspectorate—an area of legislation Britain had pioneered and that Bismarck and large industrialists in Germany vehemently opposed.<sup>115</sup> Bismarck therefore proposed a compulsory system of self-financed accident insurance, by which insurance coverage for industrial accidents replaced accident liability, and hence, accident prevention; it is a fiction that Germany thereby avoided industrial horrors of the kind suffered in Britain.<sup>116</sup>

Health insurance legislation was introduced not by Bismarck but instead on the independent initiative of a senior official, Theodor Lohmann (1831–1905), who had close links to the German social reform movement.<sup>117</sup> As it took shape in the Reichstag, it became a

---

<sup>113</sup> For a review of this literature and its historiographical implications, see E. P. Hennock, "Social Policy Under the Empire—Myths and Evidence," *German History* 16 (1998): 58–74.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60, 74.

<sup>115</sup> Hans-Peter Ullmann, "German Industry and German Social Security," in *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 133–149; Monika Breger, "Der Anteil der deutschen Großindustriellen an der Konzeptualisierung der Bismarckschen Sozialgesetzgebung," in *Bismarcks Sozialstaat. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sozialpolitik und zur sozialpolitischen Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Lothar Machtan (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1994), pp. 25–60; Arne Anderson, "Vom Glück, einen Unfall zu Erleiden. Unfallversicherung und Arbeitsbedingte Erkrankungen in der Chemieindustrie," in *Bismarcks Sozialstaat*, ed. Machtan, pp. 207–257; Dietrich Milles, "Industrial Hygiene: A State Obligation? Industrial Pathology as a Problem in German Social Policy," in *The State and Social Change in Germany, 1880–1980*, eds. W. R. Lee and Eve Rosenhaft (New York: Berg, 1990), pp. 161–199.

<sup>116</sup> Hennock, "Social Policy," p. 72.

<sup>117</sup> Lothar Machtan, ed., *Mut zur Moral. Aus der privaten Korrespondenz des Gesellschaftsreformers Theodor Lohmann*, vol. 1, 1850–1883 (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), pp. 10–18.

very devolved system of competing, self-governing schemes, which, ironically, provided the Social Democrats with an alternative locus of activity during the years of the repressive antisocialist law (1878–1890).<sup>118</sup> Contrary to common perceptions of a vast bureaucratic apparatus, German social insurance was (in contrast to schemes later introduced in Britain) largely self-financed and self-governed.<sup>119</sup> The ultimate legislation was such a political fiasco for Bismarck, who had wanted to expand the fiscal base of the Imperial government through state-sponsored schemes, that the entire era of social legislation found no mention in his memoirs apart from spiteful comments about his duplicitous and insubordinate officials.<sup>120</sup> This reveals what George Steinmetz has investigated in detail: the myth of the monolithic, autonomous, bureaucratic Prussian state.<sup>121</sup>

Did German social insurance legislation undermine the conditions for political pluralism and open conflicts of interest? Far from a bureaucratic scheme imposed from above, the Reichstag had a formidable influence on the ultimate shape of this legislation, more, in Gerhard A. Ritter's estimation, than the British parliament had when similar provisions were passed in Britain after the turn of the century.<sup>122</sup> Such schemes were, first and foremost, a rational way of managing the occupational risks attending industrial work. They had the power to atomize society, develop an awareness of individual rights and entitlements, and generate new points of conflict, as much as to foster solidarity or cohesion.<sup>123</sup> As Greg Eghigian concludes, the impact of German social insurance was decidedly double-edged:

While the state gained the loyalty of millions of insured workers, it also assumed a huge and growing responsibility. Entitlement bred its

---

<sup>118</sup> See here Gerhard A. Ritter, *Social Welfare in Germany and Britain: Origins and Development*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986), pp. 17–130.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56; on the German influence in Britain, see Hennock, *British Social Reform*.

<sup>120</sup> Otto Fürst von Bismarck, *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1928), pp. 607–612. As Ritter notes, Bismarck was himself “skeptically aloof from the bureaucracy,” *Social Welfare*, p. 56.

<sup>121</sup> George Steinmetz, “The Myth of an Autonomous State: Industrialists, Junkers, and Social Policy in Imperial Germany,” in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 257–318; Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>122</sup> Ritter, *Social Welfare*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>123</sup> Greg Eghigian, *Making Security Social: Disability, Insurance, and the Birth of the Social Entitlement State in Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

own inflationary style of politics. Individual workers were the driving force behind the highly dispersed politics of entitlement that dominated Wilhemian social insurance. Here the claims and treatment process largely atomized the insured. Insurance beneficiaries, however, invested the bureaucratic process with a moral theodicean significance, prompting an explosion of litigation.<sup>124</sup>

Likewise, the history of protective labor legislation in Imperial Germany, in particular the regulation of female work, reveals a vibrant public debate over social reform involving a wide range of academics, intellectuals, journalists, feminists, Christian socialists, and Social Democrats, who, in Kathleen Canning's words, "succeeded in dislodging the social question from the sphere of high politics and locating it in the widening arena of public opinion."<sup>125</sup>

German social insurance was a quintessentially modern phenomenon that defies easy association with any one party ideology or specific form of government, compatible as it has proven to be with Social Democratic and Christian Democratic governments under a successful postwar parliamentary democracy, as it was under a Stalinist regime with central planning, not to mention the Imperial and National Socialist states.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, after 1945, the social entitlement state became a permanent feature of the political landscape of Western Europe, the United States, and Japan. Finally, the myth should be laid to rest that in places besides Germany and Japan the welfare state was the product of grassroots political agitation. Nowhere was this the case—not in England, not in France, not in the United States. Policy makers and government officials took the initiative in all Western countries.<sup>127</sup> From such a perspective, Japanese peculiarity with respect to the early development of welfare provisions should loom much less large in the Japanese historical horizon.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>125</sup> Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 168. On the emergence of this pluralistic social reform milieu before and after 1890, see also Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics*; and Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> Eghigian, *Making Security Social*, pp. 279–288.

<sup>127</sup> Peter A. Köhler, Hans F. Zacher, and Martin Partington, eds., *The Evolution of Social Insurance, 1881–1981: Studies of Germany, France, Great Britain, Austria and Switzerland* (London: Pinter, 1982; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); Gaston V. Rimlinger, *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America, and Russia* (New York: Wiley, 1971).

## CONCLUSION

The narrative of Japanese exceptionalism that associates Meiji Japan's deviance from liberal-democratic patterns with German influences can be as misleading as it is instructive. This is particularly true of the association between "Meiji conservatism" and the "German Historical School," based as it is on questionable assumptions about Japan's "proper" historical trajectory, a simplistic understanding of the "Historical School," and untenable claims about Germany's *Sonderweg*. While not denying that bureaucratic elites enjoyed remarkable political discretion, that representative institutions were feeble, and that personal and civil liberties were more restricted in Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan than in contemporaneous Britain, France, and the United States, caution is advised before seeking German origins for Japanese bureaucratic authoritarianism. Above all, Meiji Japan should be assessed on its own terms and in appropriate international comparison, not according to double standards based on enduring orientalist misconceptions. Proper comparisons demonstrate that German influences neither were unique to Meiji Japan, nor did they have any one political valence. And like so much else that was Western, German models in education, law, and the social sciences were adapted to Japanese conditions in unique and often unpredictable ways. Students, academics, social reformers, and policy makers of the late nineteenth century, whether in Germany, Britain, the United States, or Japan, interacted with each other in highly complex ways. This global traffic in ideas aided the rediscovery of the social and political implications of individual economic action useful for the development of laws and regulations to address, and anticipate, a wide range of challenges that attended urbanization and industrialization. This would result in social policy and welfare institutions that became an enduring feature of the political landscape of twentieth-century Japan, North America, and western Europe. From this perspective, a prominent feature of Japanese history appears less exceptional, and the area that it overshadowed reveals promising terrain for new research.