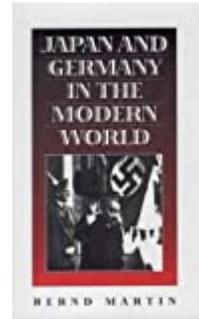




**Bernd Martin.** *Japan and Germany in the Modern World.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995. xvi + 314 pp. \$80.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57181-858-4.



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**Published on** H-German (June, 2007)

### Japan and Germany: “Fatal Affinities”

The essays in this volume examine relations between Germany and Japan from the 1860s to the end of the Second World War, a subject that, according to the blurb on the back cover, “has been largely neglected in Western scholarship.” It does seem true that scholars, by and large, have not investigated late-nineteenth-century German-Japanese connections in a systematic way, but in the popular historical imagination, the two nations were closely linked during the 1930s and 1940s in a fascist “axis of evil.”

Bernd Martin’s collection contradicts this impression in several ways. First, he shows that the influence of Germany on Japan was quite extensive in the late nineteenth century. Second, he argues that, despite superficial similarities in each nation’s twentieth-century “fascist” phase, the aggressive nationalism of Japan and the racist expansion of National Socialist Germany developed quite differently. As Martin tells it, the Japanese followed German models during the nineteenth-century modernization period, while early-twentieth-century political developments were internally driven rather than copied from Europe. Third, Martin demonstrates that the wartime alliance was in fact reluctant and half-hearted

on both sides. In sum, the relationship between Germany and Japan, before 1945, is complicated and, in many ways, surprising.

Beginning in the 1860s, Japan pursued a policy of deliberate westernization. The general contours of this story are well known, but Japan’s careful shopping for models from the European nations may be less familiar to western historians. Martin shows that Japanese leaders initially looked to Britain, France, and the United States, but found Prussian authoritarian traditions more congenial than Enlightenment republicanism or free-market capitalism. By the 1880s, Wilhelmine Germany was the most important European influence in Japan, and shaped its administrative, legal, and educational structures. Martin concludes that the “institutional and ideological foundation of the modern Japanese state and society on authoritarian structures would not have been possible without German influence and support” and that “Meiji Japan in 1889 firmly rested upon the cornerstone laid by the Germans” (p. 43).

The era of close Japanese-German ties did not last and around the turn of the century, both states concluded al-

liances that drove them apart. By the early 1920s, however, the two nations, with authoritarian social and political structures still in place, were adopting chauvinistic nationalism as a unifying device. Both nations had weak, unpopular parliamentary systems and in the 1930s, ideologies of military aggression served to divert attention from economic and political woes. The contours of those woes were, however, different. Japan was still an overwhelmingly agrarian nation with a history of social tension between the peasants and the ruling oligarchy, while Germany was an industrialized nation with an urban population and considerably diverse political opinion. Martin points out that although both countries entered a fascist phase, "fascism" was different enough in each that it is inaccurate to use the same term for both systems. One of Martin's more intriguing observations is that the Nazis used extensive terror to maintain control and crush dissent precisely because there were so many dissenting ideas and voices in German society. Japan, by contrast, with its culture of group orientation, did not need to use terror to control the population. The government "re-educated" political dissenters and through social and cultural pressure they almost always changed their ways.

The wartime alliance between Germany and Japan was a long time in coming. The Japanese objected to Nazi racism, while Hitler, being the racist that he was, refused to rely on the help of "yellow people" to fight the Soviet Union. On the eve of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler agreed to the Axis alliance in the hope of isolating the United States and keeping it confined to its own hemisphere. In this way, Martin argues, the two theaters of the Second World War must be seen, not as independent from one another, but closely intertwined.

This book is a collection of essays published between 1977 and 1994. The author decided to publish his essays, rather than write a new monograph incorporating his accumulated knowledge. A monograph probably would have smoothed over some of the choppiness of the essays. A certain amount of repetition, some overly elementary introductions (of Adolf Hitler, for example), and some confusion of more advanced material directed at audiences of specific journals could have been corrected in a monograph. On the other hand, the essays do manage to present a coherent and compelling story, from a point of view all too often ignored.

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**Citation:** Anni Baker. Review of Martin, Bernd, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2007.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13256>

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