

NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE VANQUISHED STATE:  
GERMAN AND JAPANESE POSTWAR HISTORIOGRAPHY FROM A  
TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE QUEST FOR THE LOST NATION: WRITING HISTORY IN GERMANY AND JAPAN IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY. By Sebastian Conrad. Translated by Alan Nothnagle. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. 392.

ABSTRACT

The defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945 required historians in both countries to reevaluate the past to make sense of national catastrophe. Sebastian Conrad's *The Quest for the Lost Nation* analyzes this process comparatively in the context of allied military occupation and the Cold War to reveal how historians in both countries coped with a discredited national history and gradually salvaged a national identity. He pays special attention to the role of social, discursive, and transnational contexts that shaped this process to highlight the different courses that the politics of the past took in postwar Germany and Japan. The picture that emerges of German and Japanese historiography and the respective attempts to come to terms with the past is at odds with the conventional narrative that usually praises West German historians and society for having come to terms with their dark past, as opposed to postwar Japan, which is usually regarded as having fallen short by comparison. There was in fact far more critical historiographical engagement with the past in Japan than in West Germany in the 1950s. Reasons for the divergent evolution of the politics of the past in Germany and Japan should not be sought in the peculiarities of postwar national history but rather in an entangled transnational context of defeat, occupation, and the Cold War, whose effects played out differently in each country. These conclusions and others reveal some of the opportunities and special challenges of comparative transnational history.

*Keywords:* historiography, West Germany, Japan, national identity, fascism, Cold War, transnational history

Numerous calls have been made in recent years to transcend the allegedly narrow confines and conventions of national historiography by exploring the past from a transnational perspective. This has promised new possibilities of comparison and fresh approaches to the study of regions, borderland peoples, diasporas, and colonial and postcolonial experiences without the rigid assumptions and baggage of the nation-state, highlighting instead the common transnational links and processes that have long shaped populations, such as kinship, religious and social movements, trade, migration, state-formation, technological diffusion, and warfare.<sup>1</sup> This "transnational turn" within the discipline has a complex genealogy but is undoubtedly related to an awareness of living in an era of accelerating globalization. Taking a longer view, it is the result of shifts in historical thinking

1. See "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006), 1411-1464.

that have been underway since the 1960s that resulted in sharp critiques of the legacy of the nation-state, notably ethnocentrism, racism, imperialism, war genocide, gender inequality, and heteronormativity. Impulses for history that did not privilege the nation-state also came from economic history, which had long had a strong comparative and international orientation, and not least from international and world history, which developed rapidly in the 1970s and 80s and from which transnational history has sometimes been hard to distinguish. Since the early 1990s the insights of cultural studies have highlighted the discursive practices that form concepts and ideologies, problematizing and destabilizing the national grand narrative even further. It remains to be seen how this process will play out within the historical profession, but regardless of how much stock one places in the promise of transnational history, few would dispute that the nation is no longer the automatic referent or a privileged historical perspective within the field, and the national lines demarcating historiographies are dissolving, reflected both in the training of young historians and in the new fields of history that are beginning to define the division of labor in many history departments.

It is perhaps less widely known that one of the first postnational and postimperial moments began at the end of the Second World War. In the aftermath of defeat and under Allied occupation, historians in Japan and Germany were forced to reckon with the negative legacy of nationhood and empire some two decades before the first wave of critical scholarship extended to other national historiographies. For this reason and others, greater familiarity with these two postwar historiographies is valuable for understanding the history of nationalism, and it offers opportunities to test postnational or transnational approaches to comparative history, which, to be sure, is a tall order given the challenges of the Japanese language and the sheer complexity of Japanese and German historiography. Sebastian Conrad, an innovative younger German historian who has made valuable contributions to German colonial, Japanese, comparative, and transnational history, is well qualified to offer such an analysis of these two historiographies.<sup>2</sup> The book under review is a translation of a revised and updated monograph on postwar German and Japanese historiography that he first published in German in 1999. It offers a wider audience access to this fascinating episode in the critical engagement with the national past from a comparative and self-consciously transnational perspective. The transnational context that Conrad argues linked both countries was the common experience of fascism, war, defeat, American occupation, and the Cold War. This context, he believes, accounts for many of the striking similarities in grappling with the national past that can be observed in postwar Japan and Germany (3-4).

From the outset it must be said that the English title of the book is a little misleading as the topic is confined to historiography produced in West Germany and Japan between 1945 and 1960—East German historiography and the period after 1960 are treated only in passing. This is also not a book devoted to the history of

2. See, for example, "What Time is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography," *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (1999), 67-83; *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008); *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

historical method but rather to the “concrete political and discursive conditions of historiography,” notably the question of nationhood in both countries (8). This does not itself exclude questions of method, but it differs from accounts of historiography that have, to Conrad’s mind, “marginalized what historians actually said, why they said it, and why people found their texts interesting and illuminating.” According to Conrad, method-focused accounts tend to construct illusory meta-narratives that judge right and wrong turns within the discipline with the ultimate goal of tracking progress. They are also often invested in an epistemology that tends to view historical method as a “neutral medium of non-partisan access to reality,” neglecting the role of subjectivity in shaping that reality (7-8). By taking an alternative approach that highlights content, Conrad believes these pitfalls can be avoided and the many unique aspects of postwar historiography that would otherwise be ignored—notably the interpretive frameworks that were deployed in the 1950s to both jettison and recover the national past in Germany and Japan following the catastrophe of defeat—can be studied closely to open up terrain for transnational comparison that reveals the “relationality” of German and Japanese attempts to come to terms with the past. Although he does not say so explicitly, Conrad’s aim is thus also to transcend the narrow, self-referential narratives about national historiography that attribute too much to national peculiarity, that is, historiography’s nationalist metanarratives. He also seeks to offer a corrective to the oft-repeated claim that historians in the Federal Republic engaged in a thorough housecleaning of their past in contrast to an alleged reluctance of Japanese scholars to critically engage with the darkest chapters of their history. As will be discussed below, Conrad shows convincingly that this judgment is wide of the mark.

Conrad begins his task by critically unpacking the prevailing teleological meta-narratives of the development of historical method in Germany and Japan, which at first glance appear to bear striking contrasts: in postwar Germany, the prevailing method remained stubbornly historicist<sup>3</sup> and firmly oriented toward the paradigm of *understanding*, privileging national political and diplomatic history; in Japan, postwar historiography rejected the ultranationalist historicism of the 1930s and war years and was dominated from the beginning by *kōzaha*: Marxist structural history oriented toward *explaining* Japan’s deviant path of development since the Meiji Restoration (1868).<sup>4</sup> The methodological metanarrative in Germany thus sees the period of the 1950s as one of stagnation, preparing the ground for the triumphal emergence of social-scientific history in the 1960s following Fritz Fischer’s sharp critique of the overwhelmingly uncritical and apologetic tendency

3. Conrad’s translator uses the term “historist” here to avoid confusion with Popperian “historicism,” as has been suggested by Stefan Berger and others. See Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness Since 1800* (Providence, RI, and Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 3. I will use the more familiar term “historicism” throughout the review.

4. The *kōzaha* faction of Marxist historians represented by Noro Eitarō and others emerged in the 1920s and was close to the Japanese Communist Party and Comintern. It saw Japan’s backwardness and authoritarianism as rooted in the Meiji Restoration, which they interpreted as a failed bourgeois revolution that introduced monarchical absolutism to Japan. Opposed to it was the *rōnoha* faction, represented by Ōuchi Hyōe and Tsuchiya Takao, which left the Communist Party in 1927 and viewed the Meiji Restoration as a successful bourgeois revolution, rejecting the thesis of Japanese long-term backwardness. This faction ascribed Japan’s imperialist authoritarianism of the 1930s and 40s to a powerful Japanese bourgeoisie.

of German historians in dealing with Germany's role in bringing about World War I.<sup>5</sup> In Japan, by contrast, the prevailing view is that the Cold War, rapid economic growth after the Korean War, and the ascendancy of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party in the 1950s, along with the denunciation of Stalin in the Soviet Union and the signing of a security treaty with the United States, undermined the critical consensus of Japanese Marxist historiography, allowing not only for less critical readings of Japan's national past to emerge among revisionists, but also among Japanese Marxists. Although Marxist interpretations continued to dominate Japanese historiography, these were now qualified by social history that drew inspiration from Weberian sociology and American social science. While at the methodological level Japan and Germany both appear to abandon an outdated historicism in favor of social history, suggesting common methodological "progress," this occurred later in Germany, and, it has often been suggested, a much more thorough reckoning with the past resulted in the Federal Republic. Indeed, the new social history that emerged in Japan in the late 1950s and early 1960s, somewhat ironically, empowered revisionist views of the Meiji Restoration and Japan's twentieth-century history that hindered a German-style *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). This has since invited unflattering contrasts between the politics of the past in Germany and Japan.<sup>6</sup>

Conrad argues that this view of similarities and contrasts between German and Japanese historiography—similarities and contrasts that emerge from a focus on method and autonomous "development" within the discipline—is rather misleading, as it obscures the "specific political concerns of historical interpretations." It also tends to overlook the "social, discursive, and often transnational contexts" that shaped historiography in the postwar period (30). He demonstrates this by looking at the politics at the root of postwar German and Japanese debates about the continuity of history. The author reminds the reader that in the immediate aftermath of defeat and during the years of occupation, many German and Japanese historians considered abandoning the nation or dissolving nationhood into the larger transnational entities "Europe" and "Asia."

In Germany a negative interpretation of the *Sonderweg* (special path) thesis came into being shortly after the war, which dated Germany's deviant, illiberal trajectory culminating in Hitler to Bismarck's unification of Germany under Prussia in 1871. Such interpretations had already been made during the war by some British and American historians, among them A. J. P. Taylor, and such views were shared by many in the Allied occupation.<sup>7</sup> They were also the product of south German and West German Catholic historians, such as Ulrich Noak and Robert Saitschick, as well as liberal German-Jewish émigrés, such as Erich Eyck and Hajo Holborn, who shared a critical stand toward that Prussian legacy. What

5. The controversy reached a high point with the publication of Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschlands, 1914–1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961). On the Fritz Fischer controversy, see Fritz Stern, *The Failures of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1992), 145–158.

6. For example, R. J. B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War 1945–1990* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); and Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).

7. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany Since 1815* (London: H. Hamilton, 1945).

is astonishing, however, is the speed and degree to which a traditional Protestant and Prussia-centered nationalist historiography and positive assessment of German exceptionalism—which came to view the Nazi era as a mere aberration in the otherwise admirable course of modern German history since unification—was able to reassert itself by the early 1950s and marginalize these other views. Two important figures in this process were Gerhard Ritter and Hans Rothfels, who, while adopting the transnational rhetoric of the Europeanization of Germany, reaffirmed a role for Germany that harkened back to the pan-German imperialism of the Second Reich (in the case of Rothfels), and the crusading anti-Bolshevism of the Nazi years (in the case of Ritter). Friedrich Meinecke, meanwhile, worked to rehabilitate German culture. Indeed, West German historians, nearly to a man, continued to identify with German nationalist great power politics and the closely related narrative of positive German cultural exceptionalism.

Although the Cold War context in which the West German historical profession reconstituted itself goes some way toward explaining this redeemed German nationhood, a key part of that context—largely ignored by Conrad but discussed below—was the formation of East German historiography around a Marxist-Leninist negative version of the *Sonderweg* thesis against which many West German historians consciously reacted, often in very shrill tones.<sup>8</sup> The less than thorough housecleaning of German universities, which had been deeply compromised by National Socialism, is also relevant.<sup>9</sup> Thus historians involved in Nazi *Volksgeschichte* (people's history) and *Ostforschung* (eastern studies) in the 1930s and early 40s, such as Hermann Aubin, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Hans Freyer, and Theodor Schieder—whose scholarship justified German territorial expansion, ethnic cleansing, and genocide in Poland and elsewhere in the occupied East—would become highly regarded figures in the West German historical profession. Interestingly, they would also play a key role in establishing non-Marxist social history in the 1960s, which is normally associated with more critical interpretations of German history. Although that “new” West German social history was methodologically distinct from the prevailing late historicism of most older German historians, it was not perceived as a threat in the 1950s because it rejected Marxism and shared a positive overall assessment of German history. It also shared an ambivalence about modernity that tended to justify treating the Third Reich as an anomaly, an error or “dark riddle of German history” (147). As such, a *cordon sanitaire* was placed around the Nazi years and a distinct set of methods, a new institution, and a journal for this history were developed that came to be called *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history). Directed by the Rankean paradigm of understanding, which stressed the need for sympathy with the subject, *Zeitgeschichte* privileged the perspectives of those who had directly observed (and often participated in) the Nazi regime and fought in the German Wehrmacht, thus allowing former Nazis and Wehrmacht officers to write the history of the Nazi years. And following the “great man”

8. Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989), 183-200; Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 46-48.

9. See, for example, Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

intentionalism that remained the core assumption of the vast majority of West German historians, most of the blame for the Nazi years and lost world war were laid squarely at the feet of the senior Nazi leadership. Postwar German military historiography, prominently represented by Walter Hubatsch, made parallel distinctions between irresponsible and incompetent Nazi leaders and the brave and honorable sacrifice of the Wehrmacht officers and soldiers. Even as a younger generation of West German social historians, such as Karl Dietrich Bracher and Martin Broszat, began to highlight the role of structures in German history, this scholarship turned out to be less of a threat to the apologetic consensus and in fact congruous with the above-mentioned task of quarantining the Nazi years because the pathologies of modern mass society (secularization, democracy, capitalism) could be employed to make sense of the rise of Hitler in a way that conveniently absolved the German people of their collective responsibility and left their cultural heritage untainted (156). And West Germany's forced integration into the Cold War Western bloc provided a hospitable environment in which the prewar racist and imperialist narrative of Germany's superiority to and civilizing mission in the East—with which some of the historians mentioned above had long been associated—could continue.<sup>10</sup>

The overall perspective Conrad offers of West German historiography in the 1940s and 50s is deeply unflattering and far removed from the positive image of Germans coming to terms with the past that many readers will be more familiar with, a perspective often used to contrast the politics of the past in Japan. Conrad takes a closer look at the lines of development of postwar Japanese historiography until 1960, and his analysis reinforces that impression.

As already mentioned, *kōzaha* Marxist historical materialism emerged as the predominant interpretive framework in postwar Japan drawing on strong lines of continuity to the Taishō (1912–26) and first years of the Shōwa era (1926–32), and it was widely assumed within these circles that long-term structural flaws within the Japanese state, beginning with the Meiji Restoration (which they viewed as a failed bourgeois revolution that installed an absolutist and xenophobic regime that preserved elements of a feudal social order), accounted for Japan's troubling history of authoritarianism, imperialism, and war. Unlike in Germany, where official Nazi coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) purged the universities of ideologically unreliable elements, Japan's universities and research institutes of the 1930s and 40s witnessed few such purges, and, one must add, far less opportunistic mobilization on behalf of the regime than among German historians. Thus, in some ways, Japanese historiography appears to have followed patterns of development more parallel to those in Western Europe (notably Britain, France and Italy) than German historiography did. As such, most of the postwar historians subscribing to the *kōzaha* line of interpretation, prominently represented by Tōyama Shikegi, were quick to condemn Japanese "fascism" and welcomed the defeat and American occupation as confirming their own view of history and as an opportunity for Japan to make a clean break with its past to return to a healthy path of world-historical development marked by democracy and equality. Unlike

10. On this German civilizing mission, see especially Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

in West Germany, little room was left in Japan for ultranationalist historians who had served the military regime, such as Hiraizumi Kiyoshi and others, who were denounced as unscientific imperialists. New journals and research institutes, such as the *Rekishigaku kenkyūkai* (Historical Science Society), gave that interpretive line a dominant profile. This reorientation was reinforced by much more extensive and successful American efforts at education reform in Japan than in West Germany, which completely restructured schooling and vastly increased the number of universities and colleges. Interestingly, the American occupation's interpretation of Japan's past and the reforms implemented owed much to *kōzaha* historiography via such old Japan hands as E. H. Norman, who was privy to the Japanese historiographical debates of the 1920s and 30s and advised the American military occupation informed by them.

Parallel to the *kōzaha* interpretation, but also in some ways a challenge to it, was the early cultural critique of Japanese "fascism" of Maruyama Masao. He saw it as an imposition from above (rather than as a movement from below as in Italy and Germany), which he accounted for as the result of Japan's cultural backwardness, namely the failure to separate the private from the public sphere, that is, the "lack of subjectivity and individuality" (91). Others attributed Japan's aggressiveness to centuries of cultural borrowing from China, echoing an Orientalist perspective in Japanese historiography that would, as Conrad argues, serve to "temporalize space," that is, to see the process of joining the "West" and "modernity" as part of a developmental telos that culminated in Japan leaving Asia and the backwardness and stagnation it implied (174). Such contrasts were developed most systematically by Ōtsuka Hisao and his students, melding Weberian sociology and Marxism, a synthesis that enjoyed great influence in postwar Japan. Japan's inclusion in the Cold War Western bloc lent this perspective additional legitimacy. A clear change of tone that emphasized Japanese victimhood had already begun to emerge from within Japanese Marxist historiography following the American suppression of the General Strike of 1947, the purge of Japanese communists in 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean War, all of which suggested Japan was being occupied by an aggressive imperialist power. This also opened the way to reinterpretations of the Second World War that stressed Japanese victimhood, according to which the nation had been pushed into war at the hands of a small group of semi-feudal Japanese militarists and monopoly capitalists. After the Lucky Dragon incident in 1954, such narratives were reinforced by less inhibited discussions of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as examples of Japanese victimhood.

Outside of Japanese Marxist historiography, officially sanctioned histories of the Pacific War, such as the edition published by Tsunoda Jun in cooperation with various Japanese government ministries, tended to present Japanese soldiers in war as loyal servants of the nation. In all such narratives the colonization of China in the 1930s and the crimes committed there were increasingly marginalized. As in Germany, contemporary history emerged in these years, but in Japan it was not an attempt to quarantine the wartime years but rather an outgrowth of the loss of confidence within the ranks of Japanese Marxist historiography following the rise to political dominance of the conservative Japanese Liberal Democratic Party

and rapid Japanese economic growth after 1955. Further blows to that confidence came with the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin, and the failure of the Japanese protest movement opposing the Japanese security treaty with United States in 1960. These issues came to a head in the bitter *Showashi* controversy that followed the publication of *The History of the Shōwa Era* in 1955 by the *kōzaha* Marxist historians Tōyama Shigeki, Imai Seiichi, and Fujiwara Akira. A barrage of criticism was subsequently leveled at their marginalization of agency in their account of the recent past, criticisms that were not confined to non-Marxist historians. As Conrad points out, this controversy marked an end to the dominance of *kōzaha* interpretations of Japanese history and thus had a significance similar to the Fritz Fischer controversy in West Germany.

To what extent does Conrad's transnational perspective offer a new way of interpreting the development of these two historiographies? Conrad argues that Japanese and German historiographies were entangled in complex ways with the common experience of US occupation, which attributed German and Japanese authoritarianism and aggression to fundamental structural flaws. To be sure, that narrative was less favorably received by West German than by Japanese historians, but the difference had more to do with the fact that a negative Marxist *Sonderweg* thesis gained privileged status in East Germany. Likewise, the marginalization of Chinese and Korean perspectives in Japanese historiography can be explained by the central place that the war with the United States assumed in Japanese understandings of the Pacific War in the context of the Cold War, which, as Conrad puts it, "de-Asianized" Japan (249). Conversely, West Germany's gradual abandonment of postwar nationalist apologetics and the embrace of social history in the 1960s (which took German historical deviance as axiomatic) must be seen within the transnational context of European integration, which required German contrition and apology; this had no parallel in East Asia, and it is this difference, Conrad argues—not national peculiarity or different internal histories—that explains the subsequent divergent evolution of Japanese and German historiography and memory politics after the 1960s.

One might add here that the extent of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has often been exaggerated in comparisons with Japan. The stunned West German public reaction to the American miniseries *Holocaust* in 1979 and the widespread public ignorance it revealed, as well as the general neglect of the Holocaust in German historiography well into the 1990s, are good indicators that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* remained far more limited than suggested by acts of official apology, restitution, and commemoration that emerged in those same years, official acts that were often calculated to placate former adversaries, end West Germany's diplomatic isolation, and secure international markets for industry.<sup>11</sup>

11. On the West German reception of the miniseries *Holocaust*, see Friedrich Knilli and Siegfried Zielinski, *Holocaust zur Unterhaltung: Anatomie eines internationalen Bestsellers* (Berlin: Elefantent Presse, 1982), 223-292; Andrei S. Markovits and Rebecca S. Hayden, "'Holocaust' Before and After the Event: Reactions in West Germany and Austria," *New German Critique* 19 (1980), 53-80. On the neglect of the Holocaust in German postwar historiography, see Ulrich Herbert and Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1992), 7-28. On the politics of West German contrition, see Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996); and Jeffrey Herff, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 280-288.



In such a context the degree of self-critical Japanese historiographical evaluation in the 1950s and, conversely, the sheer boldness and self-confidence with which most West German historians of the 1950s worked to evade responsibility and salvage a national past, really stand out. That evasion of responsibility was hardly confined to the writing of history, as revealed by the dramatic fall in the number of West German trials of Nazi criminals in the 1950s, the massive obstacles to such proceedings faced by state prosecutors, and numerous scandals of former Nazis attaining high political office in the Federal Republic.<sup>12</sup> And as “victim nationalism” has come to be challenged in Japan in recent years, it has seen a remarkable resurgence in unified Germany around victimhood in the Allied bombing campaign, and, as it turns out, along lines that bear resemblance to the terms of the debate over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Japanese context.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, more recent Japanese disputes about history textbooks have been shaped by protests in China, just as a more vigorous discussion of Korean victimhood in Japan is related to deepening economic ties between these two countries. The Japanese have also been keen observers of the politics of the past in Germany. This goes to show how transnationally linked these discussions have become in recent years. As Conrad concludes, “The history of memory—and the history of historiography—is part of an entangled and transnational history. Debates about the past bear the traces of a globalizing world that are deeply engraved in what is often still perceived as the realm of the uniquely national, of a peculiar mentality and mindset” (260).

There is undoubtedly much value in this comparative reading of Japanese and German historiography, and Conrad offers an important corrective to narratives that have overemphasized internal history and national character in explaining historical production and the politics of the past to the exclusion of extranational forces that shaped and constrained these processes. He thereby also questions the habitual over-reliance upon tropes of nationhood in explaining—and exaggerating—differences in German and Japanese historiography, which are themselves creatures, albeit indirectly, of nationalist historiography. On another level, Conrad succeeds in revealing how productive an analysis of historiography that focuses less on method and more on the specific political concerns that motivated historical production can be. By revealing what was at stake in reinterpretations of the national past in postwar West Germany and Japan—issues that are usually ignored except when they came to the fore in major public disputes, such as the Fritz Fischer and *Showashi* controversies, respectively—Conrad also succeeds in revealing the transnational entanglements of German and Japanese historiography and their deepening relationality as the politics of the past have become

12. See Devin Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965: Genocide, History and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14–21.

13. The catalyst for this debate was the publication of Jörg Friedrich’s controversial history of the Allied bombing campaign, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2002), since translated as *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945*, transl. Allison Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). On this “victim nationalism” as it emerged in this debate, see Robert G. Moeller, “On the History of Man-made Destruction: Loss, Death, Memory, and Germany in the Bombing War,” *History Workshop Journal* 61, no. 1 (2006), 103–134.

global phenomena whose content in recent years have come to be defined less by historians and more by public opinion.

Some shortcomings in Conrad's study are worth exploring because they reveal some of the challenges of doing this kind of history. The rendering of German historiography, in comparison to the Japanese side of his narrative, is at times unjustifiably truncated. In contrast to the rich and detailed discussion of the evolution of Japanese Marxist historiography, Conrad mentions the near universal condemnation of Marxism in West Germany where "Marxist historiography had no impact whatsoever" (50). Although there can be no doubt about the widespread rejection of historical materialism in West Germany of the 1950s, it is quite simply false that this interpretation had no impact on West German historiography. Indeed, the strongly nationalistic and apologetic contours of West German historiography in the 1950s only really begin to make sense along with some discussion of East German historiography in those same years.

Very much like the *kōzaha* interpretation of Japan's history, the Marxist German *Sonderweg* thesis was at the time a powerful interpretive framework that questioned the core assumptions and methods of German nationalist historiography and condemned the complicity of German historians in Germany's fateful path to ruin. And it enjoyed legitimacy because it had been developed freely by historians and journalists in the 1930s and 40s, many of whom, like Alexander Abusch, had been persecuted by the Nazis, imprisoned, or forced into exile.<sup>14</sup> Such prominent and internationally respected East German scholars, such as the social historian Alfred Meusel (who began his academic career in the Weimar Republic), the economic historian Jürgen Kuczynski, and the historian of France Walter Markov, fleshed out and refined these arguments in their own scholarship and were very much part of an intra-German historiographical dialogue, as were their students Joachim Streisand and Fritz Klein, who began their careers in the early 1950s.<sup>15</sup> They responded regularly to West German nationalist historiography in the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, which, while expressly an alternative to the West German *Historische Zeitschrift* devoted to Marxist-Leninist historiography, was nonetheless a serious competitor publication that intended to draw in West German contributors.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly GDR historiography became more ideologically rigid in the mid 1950s, but East German historians continued to participate in the conferences of the West German historical association (Historikerverband) until 1958.<sup>17</sup> In a study as self-consciously transnational and explicitly focused on the specific political concerns of historiography, the omission of any substantive discussion of GDR

14. An influential version of this interpretation in the immediate postwar period was Alexander Abusch's *Der Irrweg einer Nation: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis deutscher Geschichte* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1946). Abusch was a communist journalist and newspaper editor who fled first to France and then to Mexico, returning to Germany in 1946. He served as the GDR's Minister of Culture from 1958 to 1961.

15. See, above all, the very valuable memoir by Fritz Klein, *Drinnen und draußen: Ein Historiker in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000).

16. See, for example, Alfred Meusel, "Zum Vortrag von G. Ritter," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 1 (1953), 923-939; Joachim Streisand, "Bismarck und die deutsche Einigungsbewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts in der westdeutschen Geschichtsschreibung," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 2 (1954), 349-369.

17. See Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft*, 181-200.

historiography is a serious lapse, one that distorts the German side of the story and needlessly impoverishes the comparison with Japan.

There are also problems with the way the author confines the transnational context to the postwar era. Although Conrad touches on this with reference to the beginnings of the Western discipline of history in Japan (24–25), the borrowings from Imperial Germany by Meiji Japanese statesmen and bureaucrats were extensive. German examples served as models for schools, the system of higher education, the social sciences, medicine, and, especially significant for the Meiji constitution, commercial law and the civil code. The Japanese civil service, military, and social insurance schemes also drew from German examples.<sup>18</sup> Such German models, particularly in the realm of law, were, it must be added, justified on the grounds of offering a “third way” between Western liberalism and Eastern autocracy, something that added to their appeal within the conservative Meiji oligarchy and that has since raised the intriguing question of whether Japan’s fateful decision to borrow from Imperial Germany led it down the path of twentieth-century authoritarianism, militarism, and war.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, Japan and Germany were entangled much longer and more extensively than is accounted for in Conrad’s study, and this may well explain similarities that are otherwise ascribed to a common postwar transnational experience.

At the most fundamental level, Conrad’s comparison of Japanese and German historiography assumes that both countries had to master a similarly compromised past tainted by fascism. Although this was certainly a dogma of *kōzaha* historiography, the analytical validity of using this term in such different contexts is questionable. The period of aggressive Japanese militarism (1932–1945), while bearing some superficial resemblances to fascism, cannot really be usefully categorized as such, much less as National Socialism, without inflating the concept to the point of analytical meaninglessness.<sup>20</sup> And the crimes committed by the Japanese military—while massive and horrendous<sup>21</sup>—are easily overshadowed

18. On the social sciences and higher education, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, “Die preußische Bildungspolitik im Spannungsfeld des internationalen Kulturwettbewerbs: der Fall Japan (1869–1914),” in *Kulturstaat und Bürgergesellschaft: Preußen, Deutschland und Europa im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bärbel Holtz and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 203–221. On medicine, see Hermann Heinrich Vianden, *Die Einführung der deutschen Medizin in Japan in der Meiji-Zeit* (Düsseldorf: Triltsch, 1985). On the Meiji constitution, law, and the civil service, see 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).

19. As examples of this argument, see Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995); and Kenneth B. Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 674–720. For a critical assessment of this Japanese *Sonderweg* via Germany, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, “German Social Science, Meiji Conservatism, and the Peculiarities of Japanese History,” *Journal of World History* 16, no. 2 (2005), 187–222.

20. As Robert Paxton puts it, “The Japanese faced no imminent revolutionary threat, and needed to overcome neither external defeat nor internal disintegration. . . . Though the imperial regime used techniques of mass mobilization, no official party or autonomous grass roots movement competed with the leaders. The Japanese empire of the period 1932–45 is better understood as an expansionist military dictatorship with a high degree of state-sponsored mobilization than as a fascist regime.” *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 200.

21. On the highest-profile Japanese atrocity, see especially *The Nanjing Massacre in History and*

by the long list of atrocities committed by the National Socialist regime with the complicity of millions of civilian supporters, which in terms of state-directed genocidal intentionality and scale is really without parallel.<sup>22</sup> The substantial qualitative differences between the regimes and their following and the considerable quantitative differences in the scale of destruction of life and property, and, indeed, Japan's own more prominent victim status following the atomic bombings, are all relevant here, as are the negative Japanese perceptions of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal due to problems with the indictments, proceedings, and evidence, as well as dissent over the judgments.<sup>23</sup> These factors colored Japanese assessments of their past and the related politics of the past in significant ways glossed over by Conrad's study. Although the transnational context offered by Conrad goes some way toward explaining the important differences in the process of engaging with the past in postwar West Germany and Japan, it should not do so by obscuring (as it does) important differences in the specific nature of the defeated regimes and their crimes, differences that may have as much (or more) explanatory power than transnational factors.

Taking the longer view, we may ask how surprising it really was that a quest for the lost nation would begin so quickly after defeat in West Germany and Japan in the 1950s in light of a world where the process of decolonization was just beginning and the critical engagement with the national past was still a generation away. One is reminded here of Joseph Mazzini's exhortation that "without country you have neither name, token, voice, nor rights, no admission as brothers into the fellowship of peoples."<sup>24</sup> In a world where national history remained the automatic referent, such bastard status was very lonely indeed and goes a long way toward explaining the relatively rapid recovery of the "lost nation." It is to Conrad's credit that we now have a better appreciation of the full dimensions of this problem in postwar Germany and Japan and the powerful hold that nationhood continued to have over the historical imagination. This serves to highlight what a flexible and resilient concept the nation has turned out to be—even in the face of catastrophic defeat and loss of sovereignty—and suggests that it may well remain a durable concept even as the borders of nation-states and national historiographies become ever more permeable.

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*Historiography*, ed. Joshua Fogel (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000); and Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

22. Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). On the broad popular appeal of Hitler until defeat, see especially Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the important role of citizen spying and denunciation in the Nazi terror apparatus, see Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

23. John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1990), 443–484. The negative assessment of the trial has been questioned more recently by Yuma Totani, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trials: The Pursuit of Justice in the Wake of World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

24. Joseph Mazzini, *The Duties of Man and Other Essays* (London: J. M. Dent, 1907), 53.