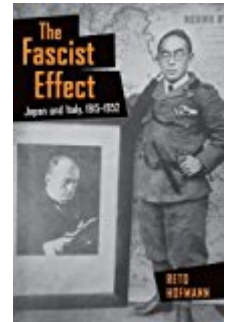


Reto Hofmann. *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. 224 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-5341-0.



Reviewed by Klaus Vollmer

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Commissioned by Cristian Cercel (Ruhr University Bochum)

Reto Hofmann has written an illuminating volume which is an original contribution not only to the study of the reception of Italian fascism in a non-Western context, but also to global intellectual history and the history of Japanese thought and culture in the prewar era. "Fascism needs to be examined through its relations" (p. 2), Hofmann claims in his introduction. While in previous research this has most often meant looking at fascism's relation to other *ideologies* (e.g., Marxism, liberalism, etc.), Hofmann intends to examine the relationship between fascisms in different *national contexts*, taking Italy and Japan as examples. This approach is significant because it "expose(s) a fundamental contradiction at the heart of this ideology" (p. 2), namely the contradiction between particularism (fascism as an ideology in a specific country, i.e., Italy) and a universalist claim, as fascism aimed to overcome the crisis brought about by capitalist modernity and which had global effects in the first decades of the twentieth century. Hofmann's study convincingly demonstrates that the discourse on fascism in Japan "simultane-

ously emanated from Italy and emerged domestically" (p. 3) and that Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and right-wing activists were very much aware of the problems that emerged from the contradiction mentioned above. How to strictly insist on the cultural uniqueness of Japan while at the same time acknowledging the power of fascist ideology to address and possibly solve the problems of modernity and capitalism that had affected Japanese society was an issue occupying the minds of many intellectuals of almost all political orientations. In fact, Hofmann's detailed narrative drawing on a wide variety of sources--books, academic and popular journals, newspapers, and visual materials--reminds us to what extent fascism was at the center of debate in the 1920s and 1930s.

In reevaluating fascism as a global ideology discussed in Japan during these decades, it is thus more adequate to conceive fascism as a process rather than a clear-cut model with fixed elements. In this way it becomes possible to view the assertions of Japanese uniqueness and its vocabulary

("national polity," *kokutai*; "imperial way," *ôdô*) and even the nominal rejection of (Italian) fascism as "part of the fascist logic itself, its drive to generate a politics of cultural authenticity" (p. 3). So when, for example, Japanese intellectuals questioned the need for a leader like Mussolini or Hitler because according to their view the emperor system provided the basis for politics more adequately in Japan, this should not be taken as a rejection of fascism in general: "they regarded fascism as open-ended, as a new politics of the right that began with Mussolini but that would find different, and possibly more sophisticated, expressions in Japan" (p. 3).

The slim but densely written volume contains five chapters. After the introduction in which the author explains his approach and assumptions, some of which were summarized above, the first chapter introduces the reader to Shimoi Harukichi (1883-1954), today a little-known Japanese poet and writer. As a long-term resident of Italy, where he moved in 1915, he later became an admirer of Italian fascism and an acquaintance of Mussolini. In 1917 he toured the front and even took part in the occupation of Fiume in 1919, where he worked as liaison for Gabriele D'Annunzio. In Hofmann's narrative, which revisits Shimoi's later activities frequently in other chapters, he acts as the "mediator of fascism" to Japan. On many occasions, Shimoi subsequently served as tour guide and interpreter in both countries. Chapters 2 and 3 ("The Mussolini Boom, 1928-1931" and "The Clash of Fascisms, 1931-1937"), covering the first decade of the turbulent Shôwa (1926-89) era, outline in detail the intellectual debates centering on the interpretation of Italian fascism and the possibilities of adapting fascism to Japanese society. Chapter 4 ("Imperial Convergence: The Italo-Ethiopian War and Japanese World-Order-Thinking, 1935-1936"), which is a revised version of an article published by Hofmann recently in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, presents a close reading of the complexities involved in the Italo-Ethiopian war,

which highlighted the expansionist ambitions of Italian fascism. In Japan, not only the camp of right-wing Pan-Asianists but also the general public condemned the brutal military attack on Ethiopia that smacked of old-fashioned European colonialism and imperialism and temporarily even disrupted diplomatic relations between the countries. On the other hand, this was a moment when the debate on fascism became linked more closely to broader questions of international relations. For some right-wing intellectuals and bureaucrats, Mussolini's war in Africa dealt a welcome blow to the world order of international liberalism dominated by Anglo-American rule and foreshadowed the fascist Axis and its policies that formed later in the 1930s. This is the topic of chapter 5 ("Fascism in World History, 1937-1943"), which discusses the Japanese discourse on the alliance with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, again employing a wide variety of sources ranging from philosophical debate to propaganda materials which introduced Italian culture and history to broader Japanese audiences. The short epilogue ("Fascism after the New World Order, 1943-1952") traces the fate of the concept during the occupation era and argues "that the long-standing Japanese association with fascism became an inconvenient truth for the Allies after the war, when Americans decided to rehabilitate Japan as their best friend in Asia in the fight against communism" (p. 7). While the concept of fascism as a solution to the problems of global capitalist modernity had carried a sense of open-endedness and the potential to adapt to specific cultural and historical contexts from the late 1920s to the wartime era, it was now largely relegated to the politics of interwar Italy. In regard to Japan the term "ultra-nationalism" gained universal acceptance although Marxist and left-wing circles continued to discuss prewar and wartime Japan as "emperor system fascism."

Hofmann has drawn on a large number of primary sources from Italian and Japanese archives and secondary sources in English. Given

his multilingual background and his linguistic competence, it is surprising and at times even disturbing, however, that Hofmann hardly mentions any German-language scholarship, naturally abundant when it comes to studies on Axis politics, but also on Japanese relations to Nazi Germany and fascist Italy or, to give one more specific example, on Japanese debates regarding the issue of *Grossraumpolitik* and the thought of Carl Schmitt that Hofmann discusses in chapter 5 (pp. 133-134). From the perspective of this reviewer, who specializes in Japanese history, it would have been mandatory to refer to, for example, the seminal work of Urs Matthias Zachmann on the discourse on international law and its reappropriation and application in interwar and early post-war Japan or the volume on Karl Haushofer and the reception of his ideas of geopolitics in Japan by Christian Spang.[1] Both monographs were published in 2013 (the bibliography mentions an English-language paper by Spang published in 2006). It is unfortunate that the author has not consulted or even mentioned these and other recent scholarly works in German extensively treating issues that Hofmann elaborates on in his volume. Besides Max Weber's venerable *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922) and Wolfgang Schieder's recent book on German visitors to Mussolini, the bibliography contains only two, rather dated, works in German, by Bernd Martin and Theo Sommer.[2] These shortcomings notwithstanding, this book is a timely contribution to the ongoing reevaluation and contextualization of fascist discourse in the first half of the twentieth century and also a welcome addition to the study of the Axis from the point of view of global history.

Notes

[1]. Urs Matthias Zachmann, *Völkerrechtsdenken und Außenpolitik in Japan, 1919-1960* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013); Christian W. Spang, *Karl Haushofer und Japan. Die Rezeption seiner geopolitischen Theorien in Deutschland und Japan* (Munich: Iudicium, 2013).

[2]. Wolfgang Schieder, *Mythos Mussolini. Deutsche in Audienz beim Duce* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013); Bernd Martin, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Vom Angriff auf Pearl Harbor bis zur deutschen Kapitulation* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1969); Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten, 1935-1940. Vom Antikominternpakt zum Dreimächtepakt. Eine Studie zur diplomatischen Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962).

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