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Transnational History and Japan's “Comparative Advantage”

Abstract: The growing field of transnational or global history spotlights connections among nations and empires. This essay suggests ways in which historians of modern Japan might contribute to transnational history, taking advantage of their Japanese subjects' determined emulation of ideas and practices in other nations. Thinking transnationally about Japan not only challenges myths of Japanese exceptionalism but also enriches transnational history by going beyond Euro-centric and U.S.-centered accounts to illuminate global currents. To demonstrate the potential benefits, I draw on several transnational studies of Japan as well as my own global history of saving money and current research on the “transnational home front.”

One of the fastest growing fields in history is transnational history or global history. My essay suggests ways in which historians of Japan might contribute to this exciting field. Scholars have not found it easy to distinguish transnational history from global history. These methodologies further overlap with comparative history, which compares similar phenomena that may have evolved independently in disparate geographical areas. The comparative study of “feudal” practices in medieval Europe and Japan is a case of the latter. Transnational history and global history, on the other hand, spotlight *connections* among nations, empires, or regions. Typically they chart the movement of commodities, ideas, institutions, peoples, and practices across borders and oceans. Ultimately, both approaches seek to explain local and global developments in ways that nation-centered historians and area specialists cannot. Transnational history presupposes the widespread existence of “nations.” It is therefore less useful, noted Christopher Bayly, in

This essay benefits from extensive discussions with members of the Global History Collaborative—Jeremy Adelman, Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, Haneda Masahi, Alessandro Stanziani, and Sugiura Miki—as well as Zoë Buonaiuto and Federico Marcon.

analyzing linkages before 1850, when empires, city-states, and local communities dominated large parts of the world.¹ Also, transnational-historical methods may reinforce Eurocentrism by emphasizing exchanges among nation-states in Europe and North America, whereas global history aims to explicate larger global currents and transformations.²

However, nothing prevents transnational history from exploring trans-regional connections between nations on a more global scale. Empirically minded historians often prefer the term “transnational history.” Rather than positing the existence of global “capitalism,” “modernity,” or “consumerism” from the start, transnational historians generally feel more comfortable researching the connections *before* attempting to determine the nature of the global transformations.³ Because this essay focuses on the world of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when nation-states had become ubiquitous, I use “transnational history” and “global history” interchangeably.

Some of the new transnational history has been spectacularly successful. Historians of Europe have long excelled in chronicling the diffusion of knowledge or people throughout the continent. Mastering several languages and archives in more than one country, these scholars successfully employ the transnational method to analyze, say, the early modern emergence of poor relief measures from Sweden to England or the rapid spread of fascist practices in interwar Europe.⁴ Other historians, notably scholars of the Indian Ocean, explore connections that transcend colonial empires and conventionally recognized regions such as East Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.⁵ In U.S. history, Daniel Rodgers’s path-breaking *Atlantic Crossings* demonstrates that the “Progressive Era” was not simply the product of exceptionalist American thinking but in many ways reflected flows of knowledge about social policy, urban planning, and rural cooperatives in Germany, Britain, France, and other European nations.⁶ Equally influential

1. C. A. Bayly, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 5 (2006), p. 1442; see also Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004).

2. See Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 44–45.

3. For an example of the global-first approach, see Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

4. See Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds., *Health Care and Poor Relief in Protestant Europe, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 1997); Patrick Bernhard, “Borrowing from Mussolini: Nazi Germany’s Colonial Aspirations in the Shadow of Italian Expansion,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2013), pp. 617–43.

5. Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

6. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

has been Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton*, a global exploration of the political economy of cotton that draws on a dazzling range of archives around the world (including that of the Japanese Spinners Association in Osaka).⁷

In general, however, transnational history still suffers from faddishness and has yet to realize its promise. The "transnational turn" has particularly been in vogue among historians of America. The *Journal of Transnational American Studies* was founded in 2008 to promote "cutting-edge, border-crossing, multidisciplinary scholarship in American Studies" focused on transnational topics.⁸ In addition, an expanding number of history departments have created positions in the "United States in the World." This is all to the good, but some formidable impediments remain. Few graduate students in American history programs in the United States are encouraged to research in foreign languages, use archives in other countries, or even take many history courses outside of American history. All too often, transnational American historians fixate on the "flows" to and from United States without engaging in *comparative* history. That is, they do little to examine the historical context of the other society that originated or received these flows. And in its fixation on America, the transnational approach in U.S. history contributes less than it should to a broader global history. Much of the work profiles how American currents or statesmen are "reflected" in other societies. Even the best of this genre—Erez Manela's impressive *The Wilsonian Moment*—exaggerates the influence of Woodrow Wilson's vision of self-determination on four anticolonial movements in 1919 in Egypt, India, Korea (March First Movement), and China (May Fourth Movement).⁹ America looms large in such accounts, often to the neglect of other connections. Manela, for example, plays down the enormous impact of World War I itself, lateral links *between* the four movements, revolutions in Russia and Central Europe, and political changes in imperialist Britain and Japan.

Spatially, transnational history remains centered on Europe, the Atlantic world, and European empires. To be sure, some historians of China have contributed significantly to global history.¹⁰ But the absence of Japan in most transnational histories has been glaring. By contrast, an earlier generation

7. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

8. Shelly Fisher Fishkin, "Editor's Note: Envisioning Transnational American Studies," *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2015), p. 1.

9. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); see also Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton, eds., *The Global Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

10. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Juergen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

of Japan specialists played a prominent role in developing comparative history.¹¹ Japan's marginal position in the new connected histories is all the more surprising, considering that it emerged as an extraordinarily dynamic nation-state following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Global accounts of European dominance commonly present Japan as the successful non-Western nation of the time. Yet rarely do they locate Japan's nation-building in processes that were occurring simultaneously within Europe. When we compare the pace of universal elementary education, military conscription, or administrative centralization, Japan appears less as the classic "late developer" and more like a determined competitor in the middle of the pack of European nations during the late nineteenth century. Recognized as one of the Great Powers by 1905, Japan was fast establishing an empire of its own and challenging the Western powers as no other outsider.

Little known to most global historians, modern Japan also quickly took its place as one of the world's greatest transnational actors and learners. Meiji-era leaders exhibited a remarkable awareness of the growing importance of international organizations among the "civilized" nations. Japanese delegates began participating in key international forums soon after their establishment and usually long before China and other non-Western states. A short list would include the Union Postale Universelle (1877), the conference that established the Greenwich Prime Meridian for international time standards (1884), the 1864 Geneva Convention (signed by Japan in 1886), the International Committee of the Red Cross (recognition of the Japanese Red Cross Society in 1887), and the Second Hague Conference (1907).¹² As one of the victorious Big Five after World War I, the Japanese government moreover played a leading role in the interwar policy committees of the League of Nations and the associated International Labour Organization and League of Nations Health Organization.¹³ Through many other channels, officials, entrepreneurs, scientists, and reformers avidly investigated Western thinking and practices, convinced that Europe and America's present would soon be Japan's future. The Iwakura Mission (1871–73) to the United States and several European countries is simply the most famous of

11. John Whitney Hall, "Feudalism in Japan—A Reassessment," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1962), pp. 15–51; Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow, eds., *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

12. Judith Fröhlich, "Pictures of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895," *War in History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2014), pp. 242–43; Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 30.

13. See Aenne Oetjen, "Locating Health—The League of Nations' Far Eastern Bureau and the Development of Regional Health Governance," paper presented to the Global History Collaborative and Humboldt-Princeton Global History Project Summer Workshop, Princeton University, May 9, 2016.

these investigations.¹⁴ Typically, Japanese observers would organize their reports into a series of models offered by Western countries, such as the Paris police's regulation of prostitution, Belgium's central bank, America's decentralized educational system, the German Army's General Staff, or the British Post Office.¹⁵ Their detailed studies are an untapped resource in our understanding of the global circulation of ideas and institutions.

The Japanese experience reveals that transnational flows did not simply move in one direction, from the European "core" to the rest of the world. Japanese are well known historically for emulating Western practices. Yet in many instances, Japanese actors were not only the takers but also the *makers* of transnational knowledge. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 inspired nationalists throughout Asia and the Islamic world. From China to the Dutch East Indies, India, Egypt, and Ottoman Turkey, reformers looked to Japan as a model of national revitalization and mobilization with which to confront European hegemony and colonial rule. Although many would later sour on Japan as it expanded into Manchuria and China, Asian leaders and thinkers commonly embraced central aspects of the Japanese model—including hygiene programs, mass education, an interventionist bureaucratic state, top-down organization of local associations, and what Prasenjit Duara calls the "East Asian modern."¹⁶ Nor was it only Asians and Africans who learned from Japan. Europeans and Americans closely observed the Russo-Japanese War, drawing lessons for fighting the next war from Japan's reputed success in military hygiene, troop morale, and home-front mobilization.¹⁷ We would do well to think of emulation as a multidirectional process within a global marketplace of ideas and practices. Just as Japanese systematically studied Western countries, European nations and the United States also busily investigated the practices of each other.

Accordingly, I am convinced that scholars of Japan could make valuable contributions to global history if we started thinking more transnationally

14. See Kume Kunitake, *The Iwakura Embassy, 1871–73*, ed. Graham Healey and Chushichi Tsuzuki (Chiba: Japan Documents, 2002).

15. For the pioneering analysis of Japanese emulation, see D. Eleanor Westney, *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

16. Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchuria and the East Asia Modern* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 2, 24, 250; Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); on the Russo-Japanese War as "global moment," see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapter 4.

17. Louis Livingston Seaman (Surgeon-Major, U.S. Volunteer Engineers), *The Real Triumph of Japan: The Conquest of the Silent Foe* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908); Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013), pp. 330, 380.

about Japan. We should exploit our “comparative advantage.” I mean this not in the economic sense put forward by David Ricardo. Rather, historians of Japan are in an unusually advantageous position to compare and link their case with many other nations and peoples in the world. This is particularly true for historians of Japan who study and work outside Japan. In Europe, Japan specialists typically read several languages, enabling multiarchival research on Japanese contacts with a variety of European nations, as well as with colonial empires in Asia and the Pacific.¹⁸ Nearly all scholars of Japan in North America have also studied a European language, and they too should be capable of leveraging their linguistic skills to research transnational exchanges. Those in U.S. and Canadian institutions commonly have the added advantage of studying and teaching Japanese history in history departments that cover many parts of the world, furthering the opportunities to think comparatively and transnationally. Fewer inclusive history programs exist in continental Europe, where “history departments” generally focus on European history, while historians of Japan are usually found in East Asian or “Oriental” studies faculties. Institutions in the United Kingdom offer more opportunity for cooperation between historians of Japan and other regions; in particular, departments of economic history and international history facilitate transnational thinking. Global history faces greater challenges in Japan, where students generally remain within self-contained programs of “Western history,” “Oriental history,” and Japanese history. Nonetheless, several Japanese scholars are doing innovative work that embeds Japan in global history, although most are historians of other countries or regions.¹⁹

Historians of Japan have one final advantage. Japanese is a more difficult language to learn than French, German, Italian, or English. If we Japan specialists truly wish to include Japan in global history, we should not wait for historians of the West to discover Japan. Clearly, it would be easier for us to research Japan’s interactions with the rest of the world than it will ever be for historians of Europe and America to master Japanese and Japanese history.

Just as scholars of Japan would enrich transnational history, the transnational method offers new ways of thinking about Japanese history. Above all, it challenges the myths of Japanese exceptionalism. So many things that look “uniquely Japanese” were in fact shaped in encounters with other

18. See Ian Nish and Yoichi Kibata, eds., *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600–2000* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000–2003); Akira Kudō, Nobuo Tajima, and Erich Pauer, eds., *Japan and Germany: Two Latecomers on the World Stage, 1890–1945* (Folkestone, U.K.: Global Oriental, 2009).

19. Haneda Masashi, ed., *Gurōbaru hisutorii to higashi Ajiashi* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2016); Shigeru Akita, ed., *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

nations. As Takashi Fujitani demonstrates, the institution and rituals of Japanese emperors after the Meiji Restoration cannot be explained by ancient traditions alone but rather were largely formed in dialogue with contemporary European concepts of monarchy.²⁰ Indeed, historians have long documented the profound influence of Western ideas in the formation of Meiji-era institutions and policies.²¹

It would be premature to proclaim a “transnational turn” in Japanese history, but a growing number of works examine transnational connections and their impact on Japan. What follows is simply a sample of this scholarship. Japan’s rise as an imperialist power, Alexis Dudden argues, was predicated on Japanese leaders’ mastery of contemporary Western discourses of international law and national sovereignty. So it was that the Great Powers accepted Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 as “legal,” persuaded by Japanese insistence that Korea no longer existed as a nation according to evolving international norms.²² Transnational approaches abound in the debate over “fascism” in Japan. Some historians, notably Japanese Marxists and later Andrew Gordon, maintain that fascism occurred for structural reasons; capitalism and class struggle developed in Japan to the point where capitalists—like their Italian and German counterparts—turned to statist solutions to confront assertive working-class movements.²³ Ranged against these materialist interpretations are several historical scholars who link radical transformations of the Japanese state to the transnational emulation of contemporary developments in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy by “renovationist” experts, bureaucrats, and military officers.²⁴ In a recent fine-grained analysis using sources from both sides, Reto Hofmann examines the interconnected history of Italian Fascism and its Japanese proponents.²⁵

20. Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

21. Kenneth B. Pyle, “Advantages of Followership: German Economics and Japanese Bureaucrats, 1890–1925,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1974), pp. 127–64; Ivan Parker Hall, *Mori Arinori* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

22. Alexis Dudden, *Japan’s Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

23. Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 333–39.

24. William Miles Fletcher, *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Sheldon Garon, *State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chapter 6; Janis Mimura, *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Welfare State* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). Rather than specify transnational links, Harootian presents a global-historical analysis, locating fascism in crises of global capitalism and a “co-eval modernity,” which Japan experienced synchronically with Western societies. Harootian, *Overcome by Modernity*, pp. xvi, xxix–xxx.

25. Reto Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915–1952* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

While much of the scholarship examines Japanese *reception* of Western ideas and practices, some historians have moved to the next step of rethinking the global currents themselves. Sho Konishi's study of nonstate interactions describes how the influential strain of cooperatist anarchism, based on mutual aid and voluntary activity, was incubated in Meiji Japan. Invited to Japan in 1874 by Saigō Takamori, the Russian anarchist Lev Mechnikov interpreted the Meiji Restoration as a modern revolution and civilizational progress toward universal liberty. Peter Kropotkin would later appropriate his ideas. Analyzing an array of Russian-Japanese cultural connections, Konishi questions our conventional reading of western European state building as the unchallenged global transformation that shaped the world at the time.²⁶

Moreover, in economic history and the history of science, Japan specialists have long thought more globally. Flows of capital, goods, and economic norms necessarily transcended the confines of the nation-state.²⁷ And Japanese scientists and their research circulated in Western centers more widely than any other set of Japanese actors and knowledge. Although language barriers and sheer distance often marginalized Japanese science, in some areas Japanese scientists helped shape science globally. Prone to devastating earthquakes, late nineteenth-century Japan became the site of rapid advances in seismology and anti-earthquake architecture. Visiting British experts teamed up with Japanese colleagues to develop a new "Anglo-Japanese science of seismology," as Gregory Clancey terms it. In his transnational history of 1,200 Japanese medical students who studied in Germany between 1868 and 1914, Hoi-Eun Kim likewise concludes that "'German' medicine was not an end product completed in Germany and then exported to Japan, but rather in a constant process of making and unmaking." This was a process in which Japanese physicians took part both in Germany and in Japan.²⁸

The most ambitious effort to situate Japan in global history has been Christopher L. Hill's *National History and the World of Nations*. The author explores the seemingly paradoxical process by which transnational

26. Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), p. 11, chapters 1–2.

27. Janet Hunter, "Deficient in Commercial Morality"? *Japan in Global Debates on Business Ethics in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Mark Metzler, *Lever of Empire: The International Gold Standard and the Crisis of Liberalism in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

28. Gregory Clancey, *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity, 1868–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 63; Hoi-Eun Kim, *Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 10; on the international reputation of leading Japanese scientists, see James Bartholomew, "Japanese Nobel Candidates in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Osiris*, Vol. 13 (1998), pp. 238–84.

forces constructed “nations” and national-history writing in Meiji Japan, Third Republic France, and the United States following the Civil War. He explicates a variety of texts that aimed to give each people a distinct history while justifying their country’s place in the emerging international order of “civilized” nations. Each nation, he argues, participated in a simultaneous “single modernity” embedded in “global capitalism and the system of sovereign states.” Though less concerned with actual connections, Hill provokes us to think beyond nation-centered histories about developments in nation building that linked Japan, France, the United States, and many other countries of the time.²⁹

No one formula exists for writing transnational history involving Japan. However, the studies above suggest the following ways of better realizing its promise. First, “transnational” means the transcendence of national borders, but it does not necessarily mean transcending the nation-state itself. On the contrary, the nation and the state remain central units of analysis in many transnational histories. It is of course important that scholars research transnational relations between nonstate actors, as Konishi has done. Migration of ordinary Japanese is another such topic, although even here the Japanese state actively managed emigration to the Americas and Manchuria and often intervened in immigrant associations once people reached their destinations.³⁰ Japan’s geopolitical position further privileged the state in transnational exchanges of knowledge and people. Few nonstate actors possessed the resources to travel to the United States and Europe. Following the Meiji Restoration, the regime quickly institutionalized the practice of sending bureaucrats, military officers, medical students, scientists, and other scholars on lengthy study tours in the West. Others were dispatched to gather information at international expositions or meetings of international organizations. The Meiji state hired more than 2,400 foreign consultants to instruct Japanese in the latest developments in political, legal, military, economic, scientific, and social affairs.³¹

Second, transnational analyses often suffer when they restrict themselves to only two countries. In particular, the longtime focus on U.S.-Japanese comparisons and connections diverts us from examining the multilateral

29. Christopher L. Hill, *National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. ix.

30. Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

31. Westney, *Imitation and Innovation*, pp. 19–21; Garon, *State and Labor*, pp. 83–85; Angus Lockyer, “Japan at the Exhibition, 1867–1877: From Representation to Practice,” in Tadao Umesao et al., eds., *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World: Collection and Exhibition* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, Senri Ethnological Studies, No. 54, 2001), pp. 67–76; Hazel J. Jones, *Live Machines: Hired Foreigners and Meiji Japan* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), pp. 6–7.

ways in which Japanese interacted in the world. The United States was exceptional in its decentralized political system and incomparable abundance, providing relatively few models to Japanese. We should be prepared to examine Japan's many other connections with Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and their colonial empires, as well as with smaller countries that were deemed to be innovative. Any survey of Japanese policy debates in the 1920s, for example, would show that officials and experts were not simply looking at America. They were also interested in New Zealand's social policies and in how Denmark's nutrition specialists insured food security during World War I while the more powerful Germany went hungry.³² By following Japanese imagination wherever it went, we gain a much broader understanding of the global circulation of ideas and practices.

Lastly, no matter how we write transnational history, we should strive to develop what global history theorist Sebastian Conrad terms its core features: connections, comparisons, and causality.³³ Think of them as the "three Cs" of global history. Some scholars begin by assuming a "globality" that in turn shapes various societies. Yet good transnational history must excavate the actual *connections* between nations and global forces, as well as identify the agents in these interactions. Nor is it enough to research the "flows" between nations and regions. We should also *compare* and contextualize the countries at each end of the flow. For instance, why did the nature of authoritarianism differ considerably in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan, despite significant connections and the wartime alliance? Then there is *causality*. We might uncover any number of transnational connections, but we always need to ask what is their value-added in analytical terms? How can those connections help explain developments at the level of either Japanese history or global history—or ideally both?

It is no easy task to achieve all three Cs. I have been engaged by comparative history throughout my career, and increasingly I approach topics from a transnational perspective. The following pages draw on my own research to illustrate the potential benefits of writing transnational history from the position of Japanese history.

The Globalization of Character Building and Nation Building

In 2012, I published *Beyond Our Means: Why America Spends While the World Saves*.³⁴ One goal was to enrich policy discussions aimed at ame-

32. Garon, *State and Labor*, p. 97; Inoue Kaneo, *Kessen eiyōgaku* (Tokyo: Kōshi Shobō, 1944), pp. 16–17, 103–5; cf. Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 23–36.

33. Conrad, *What Is Global History?* pp. 63–72.

34. Sheldon Garon, *Beyond Our Means: Why America Spends While the World Saves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

liorating high levels of U.S. household indebtedness and low saving rates. The book describes what Americans might learn from the efforts of Asian and European nations to encourage popular saving over the past two centuries. Nevertheless, *Beyond Our Means* is first and foremost a global history. Despite the subtitle, nearly half of the chapters deal with Japan and other Asian nations. I had originally intended to write a book exclusively about Japan and its history of savings promotion. The Japanese state, I assumed, had been exceptionally interventionist in people's lives, or at least it embodied a type of governance found only in East Asian polities.³⁵ Yet as I read the accounts of officials and reformers who encouraged popular saving, I realized that many of the mechanisms of moral suasion in modern Japan were adopted in conscious emulation of European practices and thinking. The Japanese state was not all that exceptional.

Indeed, we have to situate the rise of modern Japan within the global context of the late nineteenth century. When Japanese officials set out to discover the secrets of Western might following the Meiji Restoration, they observed the "civilized" powers to be obsessed with creating patriotic, hard-working, and self-reliant citizens. Readily apparent were the intense efforts by reformers and states to persuade the masses to save money. In 1861, Great Britain created the world's first Post Office Savings Bank, whereby small savers could save at any local post office. Internationally recognized as one of the era's innovative social reforms, postal savings spread to nearly every European country and their colonies.

This was precisely the moment when officials of the new Meiji state began investigating best practices in the West. Maejima Hisoka, who visited London shortly after the Meiji Restoration, persuaded his superiors to adopt British-style postal savings in 1875. Japan became only the third nation (after Britain and its dominions and Belgium) to establish postal savings—another sign that Japanese were vigorously engaged in processes of transnational emulation occurring simultaneously in the West. In 1884, Ministry of Finance bureaucrats arranged for all postal savings funds to be placed in the new Deposit Bureau, modeled on the French Ministry of Finance's Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations. Henceforth, the Japanese state promoted saving not only to mold self-reliant subjects but also, as in France, to finance national projects including war and imperial expansion.

Japanese authorities emulated another European innovation, the school savings bank. Once a week, pupils brought in their coins, to be deposited in the post office or savings bank. Beginning with Belgium in the 1860s, nation-states took advantage of expanding mass education to inculcate habits of diligence and thrift in the young. Japan quickly emerged as a central

35. See Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

player in the global history of saving. By 1906, one quarter of all Japanese elementary students held postal savings accounts—one of the highest rates of school saving in the world. And by 1910, a higher percentage of Japanese (roughly 35 per cent) held savings accounts than Britons, French, or Germans.³⁶

This story illuminates the intersection of transnational history and comparative history, and why both are essential. Transnational connections help explain how the institutional encouragement of household saving became a part of modern Japanese governance and national identity. But the mere availability of foreign models does not fully account for Meiji Japan's adoption of European savings institutions. We must compare the historical contexts in *both* Japan and the European societies. Modern Japan inherited strong traditions of "thrift" from the preceding Tokugawa period (1603–1868). Shogun and *daimyō* had relentlessly exhorted subjects to economize. Increasingly, merchants and peasant reformers, notably Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), communicated more positive messages of saving grain or money for future prosperity.

Late Tokugawa-era developments meshed well with evolving Western thinking and practices, as illustrated by the success of the Japanese translation in 1871 of Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*, a Victorian-era bestseller. Smiles emphasized the importance of "character," self-control, and diligence and thrift. These virtues appealed to Confucian-educated samurai, merchants, and rich peasants.³⁷ However, to understand why Smiles made such a hit in Meiji Japan, we must also place his original writings in Britain in a more global context. His books *Self-Help* (1859) and *Thrift* (1875) were hardly odes to rugged individualism as they are often caricatured. Smiles preached that character building and nation building were two sides of the same coin. Like many liberals of the era, he insisted that only when the state established institutions like schools and postal savings banks would working people be able to help themselves. Smiles himself championed the creation of the Post Office Savings Bank and school savings programs in Britain. Accordingly, many Japanese officials read Smiles as a proponent of inculcating diligence and thrift in the people to create a powerful and prosperous nation.³⁸

Japan's triumph in the Russo-Japanese War marks another transnational moment in the realm of character building and nation building. The world would no longer regard Japan as a mere emulator but rather as a key agent in global history. Many Westerners looked to plucky Japan as a model for the reinvigoration of their own societies. Obsessed with a sense of national

36. Garon, *Beyond Our Means*, pp. 144, 155.

37. Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salaryman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), chapter 1.

38. Garon, *Beyond Our Means*, pp. 48–57, 151–58.

decline, British proponents of “national efficiency” remarked upon the Japanese state’s success in molding a patriotic, frugal people who sacrificed for their country at home and on the battlefield. In *Great Japan: A Study in National Efficiency*, the journalist Alfred Stead wrote admiringly of school-children, farmers, and laborers patriotically saving in post offices and banks to finance the war. In Japan, “no one Atlas is left to bear up the skies—every man, woman, and child is ready and proud to share the task.” This was because, claimed Stead, every Japanese embodied “Bushido” in their frugality and self-sacrifice. They “retain all the instincts of the samurai.”³⁹

It is in *bushidō*, “the way of the samurai,” that we grasp the surprisingly global circularity of national identities. *Bushidō* would come to connote the unique and fanatical spirit of the Japanese people during World War II. But that was not its origins. Only a small percentage of families in the Tokugawa era were samurai, and it would have been presumptuous for commoners to identify with samurai values. The modern cult of *bushidō* may be explained largely in transnational terms. In 1899, the Quaker educator Nitobe Inazō published *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, declaring that *bushidō* had “permeated all social classes” since the Meiji Restoration. Nitobe wrote the book in English, not Japanese, and in dialogue with Western preoccupations about national reinvigoration. The book was widely reprinted in the United States and Britain, and soon translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Polish. Nitobe claimed to have recognized the enormous influence of *bushidō* only after a Belgian jurist challenged him to explain how Japanese imparted “moral education” in the absence of European-style religious instruction in the schools.⁴⁰

When Japan defeated Russia in 1905, Western observers embraced Nitobe’s version of *bushidō* as the most readily accessible explanation. The Japanese had triumphed allegedly because of loyalty to the nation, frugality, military valor, and an enduring tradition of “chivalry.” However, these were also virtues in the contemporary West, as Great Power rivalries spurred nation-states to mobilize their peoples. Rather than regard *bushidō* as uniquely Japanese, many Westerners proposed to emulate it. At the height of the Russo-Japanese War, H. G. Wells, himself a champion of “national efficiency,” wrote *A Modern Utopia*, in which he called the incorruptible, austere guardians of his utopia the samurai.⁴¹ Another British admirer of *bushidō* was Robert Baden-Powell, the general who founded the Boy Scouts

39. Alfred Stead, *Great Japan: A Study in National Efficiency* (London: John Lane, 1906), pp. xvii, 28–30, 38, 50; G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and British Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 1–2, 57–59.

40. Inazō Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1899), 17th ed. (Tokyo: Teibi Publishing, 1911), pp. v, ix.

41. H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), chapter 9.

in 1907 to revive “amongst us, if possible, some of the rules of the knights of old, which did so much for the moral tone of our race.” Unfortunately, he noted, “chivalry with us has, to a large extent, been allowed to die out, whereas in Japan, for instance, it is taught to the children so that it becomes with them a practice of their life.”⁴² Whether *bushidō* or the Boy Scouts, the new drive to inculcate youth in martial and civic virtues reflected direct transnational connections as well as larger global currents. Baden-Powell’s efforts in turn influenced Japanese authorities to organize Boy Scout troops in the 1910s and 1920s as part of a larger movement to establish young men’s associations (*seinendan*) at the grass roots.⁴³ As for *bushidō*, Japanese elites did not commonly apply the term to their own people until after Nitobe’s book became popular with Westerners. It was translated *back* into Japanese in 1908.⁴⁴

In the realm of promoting saving, the circularity of transnational learning likewise continued over the next several decades. The British and French originally provided Japan with the model of a postal savings bank that would invest its growing funds to strengthen the nation. The Japanese state then launched the world’s first war savings campaign during the Russo-Japanese War. After World War I broke out, the British government established an even more extensive National War Savings organization that reached down to local war savings associations. The Japanese Ministry of Finance in turn modeled its interwar savings drives after Britain’s National Savings system, run by a similar central committee that coordinated grass-roots savings associations (*chochiku kumiai*). The Japanese state also emulated the British campaigns in the unprecedented recruitment of women’s and religious organizations to encourage saving. When Japan embarked on war with China in 1937, officials again drew on the British model to institutionalize a war savings campaign that continued through the Pacific War.

The crushing defeat of Japan in 1945 did little to reverse the transnational impulses that promoted austerity and saving. The Japanese government mounted a new round of intrusive savings drives, this time called the National Salvation Savings Campaigns (1946–49). The campaigns aimed to curb hyper-inflation and generate the capital to finance the rebuilding of

42. Italics added. Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (London: Horace Cox, 1908), chapter 7.

43. Richard J. Smethurst, *A Social Basis for Prewar Japanese Militarism: The Army and the Rural Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 25–31. The Boy Scouts of Japan was founded in 1922, promoted actively by its Chief Scout, Gotō Shinpei, who twice served as home minister. J. Charles Schencking, *The Great Kantō Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 337, note 67.

44. Nitobe Inazō, *Bushidō*, trans. Sakurai Ōson (Tokyo: Teibi Shuppansha, 1908).

bombed-out Japan. There was nothing exceptional about Japan's postwar austerity campaigns. As Japanese officials frequently noted, every war-ravaged state in Europe was also haranguing its people to economize and save—Britons, Soviets, French, Belgians, Dutch, and Germans. Throughout the 1950s, too, bureaucrats reported on best practices in savings promotion in Western Europe. The Japanese state continued to coordinate savings campaigns even as the economy recovered and grew. But so did most European governments.⁴⁵

The case of postwar savings-promotion programs is an excellent illustration of how research on Japan can help in *getting global history right*. Many historians write about the irresistible advance of American-style “consumer society” in Europe and Japan after 1945.⁴⁶ But once again, the American model was not the only show on the global stage. In archives in Britain, France, and Belgium, I discovered histories of interventionist postwar “national savings” campaigns that resemble the Japanese story. Supported by conservative and social democratic parties alike, these campaigns aimed at financing industrial recovery and the new welfare states while constraining the conspicuous consumption of the rich.⁴⁷

Japan later emerged as the world's leading model of savings-driven growth, inspiring developmental strategies in other Asian economies.⁴⁸ South Korea, a Japanese colony until 1945, inherited Japanese savings campaigns, savings associations, and postal savings. In 1969, the Bank of Korea emulated the Bank of Japan in setting up its own Central Council of Savings Promotion, which coordinated a series of “frugality campaigns.” During the 1970s, Singapore transformed the British colonial-era Post Office Savings Bank into a Japanese-style institution that vigorously encouraged small savings, which the government likewise invested in developmental projects. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Japanese government regularly advised Southeast Asian states on practices to promote saving. As recently as the early 2000s, the central bank of Malaysia was actively emulating Japanese savings campaigns and distributing household account books to women. In China, too,

45. “Kaigai chochiku posutā, kyatchi fureezu-shū,” *Chochiku jihō*, No. 19 (1954), pp. 67–71; “Berugii, Oranda ryōkoku no chochiku undo,” *Chochiku jihō*, No. 43 (1960), pp. 56–57. For early postwar savings-promotion activities in Europe and Japan, see Garon, *Beyond Our Means*, pp. 210–20, 256–76.

46. Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Scott O'Bryan, *The Growth Idea: Purpose and Prosperity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

47. On European ambivalence toward American consumerism, see Lizabeth Cohen, “The Consumers' Republic: An American Model for the World?” in Sheldon Garon and Patricia L. Maclachlan, eds., *The Ambivalent Consumer: Questioning Consumption in East Asia and the West* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 58–62.

48. Garon, *Beyond Our Means*, chapter 10.

following the leadership's decision to reform the economy in the late 1970s, Japanese and Chinese officials worked together to expand China's postal savings system and other savings-promotion programs.

Nowadays, we think of "thrift" as a manifestation of "Asian values" or Confucianism. Few are aware that several European nations—Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden—are among the world's top savers, currently saving at rates around ten per cent of disposable household income. *Beyond Our Means* describes how the high-saving nations of Europe and Asia share not a common cultural heritage but rather an interconnected modern history of intervening to encourage their peoples to save and avoid overindebtedness.

The Transnational "Home Front": Its Construction and Destruction

Thinking transnationally is equally useful in my current project on home fronts in Japan, Germany, and Britain in World War II. The study rests on archival research in those three countries plus the United States. Although several works explore the making of postwar global orders after 1918 and 1945, few transnational histories examine the wars themselves.⁴⁹ This is a missed opportunity. The two world wars were strikingly transnational moments. Millions of people crossed borders and oceans, while the warring states committed unprecedented resources to investigating, emulating, and improving on the tactics of enemies and allies alike. Military historians have long understood this, but not so historians of the home fronts. World War II was a global event, yet histories of the home front remain confined to individual nations. Books on the Japanese home front describe how civilians experienced food shortages and bombardment, as the authorities harangued them to fight to the finish against the expected U.S. invasion.⁵⁰ But rarely do historians explicate the transnational developments that led Japan and the other belligerents to use and abuse their citizens or the global thinking that made it "normal" for nations to target the enemy's civilian population.

Let us broaden the frame and consider that the concept and practices

49. See Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sebastian Conrad, "The Dialectics of Remembrance: Memories of Empire in Cold War Japan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2014), pp. 4–33; Frederick R. Dickinson, "Toward a Global Perspective of the Great War: Japan and the Foundations of a Twentieth-Century World," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (2014), pp. 1154–83; Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*.

50. Samuel Hideo Yamashita, *Daily Life in Wartime Japan, 1940–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015); Thomas R. H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two* (New York: Norton, 1978).

of the “home front” in Japan were transnationally constructed. In the years leading up to World War II, planners around the world systematically investigated how other nations were preparing for what they all called “total war.” Victory in the next war, they believed, depended not only on military success but also on how well each belligerent mobilized civilians to support the war effort at home. Total war introduced the common challenges of maintaining war production, feeding civilians, sustaining civilian morale, mobilizing household savings, and defending cities from aerial bombardment. By 1941, one might have journeyed from democratic Britain or Nazi Germany to Soviet Russia and authoritarian Japan, and recognized many familiar features of wartime life: air raid wardens, blackouts, evacuations, ration coupons, and unappetizing food substitutes. These similarities were far from coincidental but rather resulted from nations learning from each other’s efforts to defend their home fronts. Transnational learning had its lethal side, as well. Between 1914 and 1945, strategies developed globally that aimed at winning wars by destroying the enemy’s home front by blockade, bombardment, and “demoralizing” the civilian population.

Japan was at the center of these discourses, although it remains marginalized in efforts to write a more global history of civilians in World War II. In his magisterial book *The Bombing War*, Richard Overy deftly connects the histories of aerial bombardment throughout Europe. Japan, by contrast, merits only a few references, despite its key roles as both bomber and bombed.⁵¹ Japan’s exclusion is no doubt related to its distance from the European theater and the challenge of reading Japanese sources. Yet it is also rooted in the widespread belief that wartime Japan was led by exceptionally fanatical and nativist figures who thought nothing of sacrificing their civilians. The United States confronted “these funny people who didn’t know what the Western world was about,” recalled I. I. Rabi, the brilliant Manhattan Project scientist.⁵² In fact, Japan was much more connected to global currents at the height of World War II than most scholars recognize. Legions of military officers, bureaucrats, and experts continued to survey the latest trends in home-front mobilization in Europe.

The transnational story of the home front begins with the perceived lessons of World War I. The most influential of these involved the link between food and civilian “morale” in a protracted war.⁵³ Imperial Germany provided

51. Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

52. Interview with I. I. Rabi, in *The Day After Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Atomic Bomb*, directed by Jon Else (1980); on Japanese leaders not caring about civilians’ lives, see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, “Were the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Justified?” in Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: New Press, 2009), pp. 116–17.

53. See Sheldon Garon, “The Home Front and Food Insecurity in Wartime Japan: A Transnational Perspective,” in Hartmut Berghoff, Jan Logemann, and Felix Romer, eds., *The*

the cautionary tale of a powerful belligerent that lost the war seemingly after its home front “collapsed.” Aiming to foment discontent among German civilians against their government, British strategists had mounted a crippling blockade of goods and food bound for Germany. Together with the Reich’s ineffectual food supply policies, the blockade resulted in dire food shortages. Large numbers of Germans died of starvation in the “turnip winter” of 1916–17 and its aftermath. Housewives protested in the streets against the government’s food policies, and factory workers went on strike. In October and November 1918, sailors mutinied, and revolutionary workers’ and soldiers’ councils sprang up in many cities. The beleaguered kaiser abdicated and the new democratic leaders quickly agreed to the armistice of November 11 dictated by the Allied Powers.

The lessons of Germany’s collapse in 1918 were not lost on Japanese observers. Fighting on the side of the Entente against Germany, the Japanese government studied the European home fronts more thoroughly than any other warring state. Several ministries dispatched young bureaucrats to investigate mobilization programs in Britain, France, Italy, and later the United States. Japanese officials also observed developments in Germany from nearby Switzerland and other neutral countries. Their highly detailed reports informed the special investigative commissions instituted in the ministries of Army, Navy, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Finance, Education, Posts and Communications, and Agriculture and Commerce. Based on their observations of wartime states and societies, these commissions made crucial policy recommendations that would guide Japan over the next two decades in peace and war.⁵⁴

For an influential clique in the Japanese Army, World War I demonstrated the centrality of “total national mobilization” (*kokka sōdōin*), later a core element in the global “total war” thinking of the 1930s. In future wars, these officers insisted, a successful nation must mobilize not just soldiers and war workers but also the material, human, and financial resources of the entire nation. That included recruiting women in nursing, food distribution, war savings campaigns, and factories, as the Europeans and Americans had recently done. As the Army’s Provisional Military Investigative Commission put it in 1917, “warfare in this day and age truly demands the total energies of the nation.”⁵⁵ Civil bureaucrats too noted the success of Britain and other belligerents in organizing neighborhoods into savings associations

Consumer on the Home Front: Second World War Civilian Consumption in Comparative Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

54. Jan Peter Schmidt, “Nach dem Krieg ist vor dem Krieg—Der Erste Weltkrieg in Japan: Medialisierte Kriegserfahrung, Nachkriegsinterdiskurs und Politik, 1914–1918/19” (Ph.D. diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2013), pp. 267–72.

55. Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iin, *Ōshūsen to kōsen kakkoku fujin* (Tokyo: Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iin, 1917), p. 1; Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iinkai [Nagata Tetsuzan], “Kokka sōdōin ni kansuru iken,”

and food committees. When Home Ministry officials in the early 1920s directed local authorities to establish residential women's groups (*fujinkai*) in villages and urban districts, they pointedly cited European precedents from the recent war.⁵⁶

Japanese officials paid particular attention to the question of food and home-front morale in World War I, drawing much the same conclusions as the Europeans. Observers admired Britain's rationing program and the campaigns to persuade civilians to waste less food and grow vegetables in empty urban spaces. Conversely, they repeatedly invoked Imperial Germany's failure to feed its people as a warning about what might befall an unprepared Japan in the next war. Japanese officers reported on Germany's food shortages and their role in inciting workers' riots as early as 1917. Over the next decades, the Japanese Army's food experts embraced the German high command's "stab in the back" legend that "in the previous European War, although Germany was winning militarily, it collapsed from within because of food shortages."⁵⁷

The lessons of World War I took on immediacy for Japanese officials in the wake of their own crisis of "1918." In July and August, townspeople and workers throughout Japan took part in "rice riots" as the price of rice soared. Many Japanese connected the rice riots to food riots sweeping Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Taking a cue from wartime European food programs, the Japanese state responded with twin policies to diversify the national diet while increasing the supply of food that could be imported from the rest of the Japanese empire. During the 1920s and 1930s, the authorities enlisted nutrition scientists and women's representatives to instruct households to supplement rice with vitamin-rich barley, beans, and more vegetables. They also aggressively encouraged the cultivation of Japanese varieties of rice in colonial Korea and Taiwan, sugar in Taiwan, and soybeans and grains in Manchuria.⁵⁸ In 1936, Japanese experts declared food self-sufficiency within the empire. Nor did the first two years of war in China diminish the Japanese food supply. Concluded economist Elizabeth Schumpeter in 1940, the Japanese empire's "food supply is more than sufficient *even under war conditions*."⁵⁹

May 1920, in Kōketsu Atsushi, *Sōryokusen taisei kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1981), pp. 213–44; Schmidt, "Nach dem Krieg," pp. 273–75, 286–87, 307–8.

56. Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, pp. 126–29.

57. Fujioka Manzō, "Saihō senjō sakusen keika oyobi kōsenkoku no jōtai (shōzen)," *Seiyū*, No. 208 (July 5, 1917), p. 8; Marumoto Shōzō, *Kūshū to shokuryō* (Tokyo: Tōka Shōbō, 1944), preface, pp. 40–44.

58. Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion, 2006), pp. 68–69, 79–84, 120–22.

59. Italics added. E. B. Schumpeter, "Japan, Korea and Manchukuo, 1936–1940," in Schumpeter et al., eds., *The Industrialization of Japan and Manchukuo, 1930–1940* (New

After Japan launched the Pacific War in December 1941, planners implemented many of the food policies they had observed in Britain and Germany in the early stages of World War II. The Japanese regime had already introduced rationing of rice in the six big cities in April 1941, extending the system to the rest of the nation in February 1942. Officials transformed the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry into a “ministry of food” as found in Britain and Germany. The ministry became responsible for the production, collection, distribution, and pricing of all food.⁶⁰ Nutritionists boasted that Japan would avoid the fate of Germany in 1916–18 because Japanese food rations—rich in protein and low in fat—would nourish the people at lower caloric levels than the fattier German diet.⁶¹

As it turned out, Japan’s transnationally inspired food policies barely sustained Japanese civilians for the remainder of the war. In the end, the Japanese home front succumbed to even worse hunger than had plagued the German people in 1918. Allied attacks on Japanese shipping effectively halted rice and sugar imports from Southeast Asia and Taiwan by the end of 1944. The blockade of Japan became nearly total in the war’s last months in a U.S. offensive called Operation “Starvation.” B-29 bombers dropped aerial mines in the waters of the Straits of Shimonoseki, the Inland Sea, and the western Japanese ports that handled shipments of food and fuel from Korea, Manchuria, and China. The blockades cut as much as 20 per cent of Japanese food consumption as measured by calories.⁶² Although we fixate on the role of the two atomic bombs in ending the war, we must also consider that influential Japanese leaders and industrialists had already concluded that malnourished civilians were too weak to work or resist the expected U.S. invasion. Alluding to the transnational specter of another “1918,” former prime minister Konoé Fumimaro warned that worsening deprivations on the home front would fuel popular unrest and a “Communist revolution.”⁶³

As important as food issues were in constructing the transnational home front, defense against aerial bombardment emerged as the single most important imperative in mobilizing everyday life in Japan and among the European belligerents. Here, too, offense and defense were everywhere linked

York: Macmillan, 1940), pp. 277, 279; B. F. Johnston, *Japanese Food Management in World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953), pp. 67–68, 50–66.

60. Johnston, *Japanese Food Management*, pp. 178–84.

61. Inoue, *Kessen ei-yōgaku*, pp. 16–17, 103–5.

62. United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Naval Analysis Division, *The Offensive Mine Laying Campaign against Japan* (Washington: USSBS, 1946), pp. 14–16; Frederick M. Sallagar, *Lessons from an Aerial Mining Campaign (Operation “Starvation”)*, A Report Prepared for United States Air Force Project Rand (Santa Monica CA, 1974); Johnston, *Japanese Food Management*, pp. 138–43.

63. “Konoé Memorial,” February 14, 1945, in David Lu, ed., *Sources of Japanese History*, Vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 170.

from the start. Already in World War I, German Zeppelins and bombers killed hundreds in London and Paris, and British and French air forces bombed towns in Germany's industrial heartland. Following the war, influential air strategists, notably Italy's Giulio Douhet in 1921, argued that destroying cities would win wars independently of ground combat. Working-class neighborhoods were their preferred target. Bombardment, they prophesied, would terrorize and "demoralize" workers into pressing their governments to surrender, just as the British blockade and food shortages had reputedly accomplished in Germany in 1918.

These ideas of "strategic bombing" spread among militaries in Europe, the United States, and Japan during the interwar decades. Echoing Douhet, the French Army aviation expert Marcel Jauneaud in 1922 advised Japan's Army Aviation Department to build long-distance bombers that could burn the enemy's capital, destroy its factories, and demoralize the populace.⁶⁴ Japan's naval and army air forces went on to become the world's leading practitioner of strategic bombing on the eve of World War II. From 1938 to 1941, Japanese planes repeatedly firebombed Chongqing, the Chinese Nationalist government's rearguard capital, which lay hundreds of kilometers behind the front lines. An estimated 11,885 to 15,000 residents died. This was one of the first times that air power attempted to defeat the enemy by sustained attacks on its capital city, and the British and German air forces keenly monitored the Japanese campaign.⁶⁵

After war broke out in Europe in September 1939, the German Luftwaffe staged deadly air raids on Warsaw, Rotterdam, and then Britain in the "Blitz" (1940–41). Yet it was the British and later the Americans who fully embraced Douhet's ideas. The British developed the tactic of nighttime "area bombing," by which bomber commands targeted urban centers

64. Juergen Paul Melzer, "Assisted Takeoff: Germany and the Ascent of Japan's Aviation, 1910–1937" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2014), p. 140; for the origins of strategic bombing, see Sheldon Garon, "Ursprünge und Entwicklung der Strategischen Bombardierung," in Gorch Pieken, Mathias Rogg, and Ansgar Sneathlge, eds., *Schlachthof 5: Dresdens Zerstörung in literarischen Zeugnissen* (Dresden: Militär Historisches Museum, 2015), pp. 29–41.

65. Tatsuo Maeda, "Strategic Bombing of Chongqing by Imperial Japanese Army and Naval Forces," in Tanaka and Young, eds., *Bombing Civilians*, pp. 135–53; Edna Tow, "The Great Bombing of Chongqing and the Anti-Japanese War, 1937–1945," in Mark Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven, eds., *The Battle for China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 256–82; "Japanese Air-raids on Chungking and in Chungking Consular District in August, 1940," from A. J. Martin, Consul General, Chungking, to Ambassador Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, British Embassy, Shanghai, Sept. 17, 1940, Reports on Effects of Japanese Air Raids. Estimates of Strength of Chinese Air Force, 1939 August–1945 March, Records of War Office, WO 208/299, The National Archives of the UK (hereafter, TNA); Sudō Kinji, "Bomben auf Tschungking," *Der Adler* (German Air Ministry), No. 24 (November 1941), pp. 592–93.

and densely populated workers' neighborhoods in Germany. The U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) preferred precision bombing of military-industrial targets, but the Americans joined the British in firebombing cities in the war's final months. Their tactics reflected the evolving transnational thinking that the bombardment of workers would decimate the enemy's war production while inciting the surviving workers to rise up in revolution against Hitler. In another transnational leap, what the Allies learned in destroying German cities was quickly transferred to the USAAF's firebombing campaign against Japanese cities in 1945. These tactics included bombing city centers, targeting working-class neighborhoods, dropping ever-more lethal incendiary bombs (notably napalm), and finally expanding the bombing campaign beyond the metropolitan areas to scores of small and medium cities throughout Japan. In one night alone on March 9–10, raids by nearly 300 B-29s succeeded in killing 100,000 residents in central Tokyo.

As nations during the interwar decades prepared to destroy each others' home fronts, they simultaneously drew on transnational knowledge to devise ways of defending their own cities from air attacks. Experts—including Japanese observers posted in Europe in 1916–18—distinguished “active” air defense (antiaircraft guns or fighter planes) from “passive” defense. Later known as “civilian defense” or civil defense, passive defense referred to evacuation of civilians and the construction of air raid shelters. Increasingly, however, civilian defense sought not simply to protect civilians but also to mobilize them to take part in their own defense. After World War II broke out in Asia and Europe, millions of men and women were recruited to serve as neighborhood-based air-raid wardens, auxiliary firefighters, fire watchers, first-aid workers, and members of workplace civil defense groups.

If one is prepared to think transnationally in the archives, it is not difficult to grasp the rapid circulation of ideas and practices of civil defense. The same phrases appear in Japanese, British, German, and French documents, and at roughly the same time and in the same contexts. Civil defense in each country developed out of leaders' fears that future air raids would trigger mass panic and the immediate collapse of the home front. In Britain, the Home Office reported the dire “loss in morale” after Germans bombed London in World War I. In 1924, the government's Sub-Committee on Air Raid Precautions began secretly formulating civil defense policies that would prevent “panic,” “chaos,” and “moral collapse” in the aftermath of future attacks on London.⁶⁶

The Japanese state went further, establishing itself as one of the pio-

66. Air Raid Precautions Committee, 10th meeting, December 1, 1924, 17th meeting, March 30, 1925, and “Air Staff Notes on Enemy Air Attack on Defended Zones in Great Britain,” A.R.P./5, May 28, 1924, Memoranda, Records of the Cabinet Office, Committee of Imperial Defense, CAB 46/1 and 46/3, TNA.

neers in civil defense. In July 1928, Army and civil authorities held the world's first mass air-raid drill in Osaka, mobilizing two million residents from the state-organized women's, youth, and veterans' associations. The Western press and foreign embassies widely reported the exercise.⁶⁷ Japanese interest in air defense was rooted in the confluence of transnational and domestic developments. During World War I, Japanese Army observers in London and Paris had reported that German bombers preferred to "menace" civilians rather than target military sites. In the future, speculated the Provisional Military Investigative Commission in 1919, were enemy planes to firebomb Japan's cities of wood, the raids would "eviscerate civilian morale" (*kokumin no shiki o sōshitsu seshimuru*).⁶⁸ Those transnational nightmares became all too real in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The earthquake and ensuing fires killed some 100,000 people in Tokyo and Yokohama. Army and civil authorities were shocked by the breakdown of public order. Vigilante groups murdered several thousand Korean migrants and hundreds of Chinese. General Ugaki Kazushige, the future Army minister, wrote in his diary: "Chills run down my spine when I think that the next time Tokyo suffers a catastrophic fire and tragedy on this scale, it could come at the hands of an enemy air attack." The earthquake strengthened the position of officials who wished to prepare urban residents for air raids. The Japanese takeover of Manchuria in 1931–32 and then war with the Republic of China in 1937 accelerated the building of a nationwide civil defense system reaching from the ministries down to the neighborhoods.⁶⁹

Although few Japanese would have appreciated it at the time, the state's access to transnational knowledge powerfully shaped the mobilization of their everyday lives. During the first half of the 1930s, many nations recognized that the main threat to the cities would come from incendiary bombs rather than high-explosive bombs or poison gas (the major powers had by then ratified the 1925 Geneva Protocol against chemical and biological weapons). Incendiary bombs could be dropped by the thousands in the form of small "stick" bombs that fell through the roofs of houses. Professional firefighters would be overwhelmed, concluded Weimar Germany's Ministry of Interior in 1932. German officials therefore proposed to create

67. See, for example, "The Air Manoeuvres," *Daily Telegraph* (London), August 16, 1928, p. 8, and the diplomatic cable from Deutsche Botschaft, Tokio, to Auswärtiges Amt, "Luftangriffe," December 29, 1928, *Luftschutz für die Zivilbevölkerung*, Vol. 2, October 1928–June 1929, R32813, IIF Luft, Politische Archiv, Foreign Office, Germany, Berlin (hereafter, PA).

68. Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iin, *Sansen shokoku no rikugun ni tsuite*, 5th report (Tokyo: Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iin, 1919), pp. 74–77.

69. Entry of September 6, 1923, Ugaki Kazushige, *Ugaki Kazushige nikki*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1971), pp. 445–46; Schencking, *Great Kantō Earthquake*, pp. 76–77; Senda Tetsuo, *Bōkū enshūshi* (Tokyo: Bōkū Enshūshi Hensanjo, 1935), pp. 5, 31.

neighborhood units for “self-protection” (*Selbschutz*). Every firebomb must be extinguished to prevent larger fires, they wrote, and this must involve the “entire population.” Each apartment house was to organize a “house fire brigade” (*Hausfeuerwehr*) from among the residents, including some “brave women.” Each street would in turn constitute an “air defense community” (*Luftschutzgemeinschaft*), supervised by a street warden.⁷⁰ Two years later, Japanese Army researchers likewise concluded that every household must be trained in methods of spotting and extinguishing the stick bombs. In Japan’s air-raid drills, residents were instructed that they had just five minutes to douse flammable materials around the firebomb before the flames engulfed the house and the neighborhood.⁷¹ From then until the U.S. bombing campaign of 1945, Japanese neighborhood associations—comprised largely of women—formed bucket brigades and trained incessantly to extinguish incendiary bombs. In wartime Britain, the government similarly advised every household to buy a “stirrup pump,” a simple bucket of water with a 30-foot hose whose spray reputedly would speed up a firebomb’s combustion from ten minutes to one.⁷²

These parallels in mobilizing entire populations were hardly coincidental. The home fronts were intimately connected. In the Japanese case, one can readily trace the channels by which officials and experts surveyed Nazi Germany’s state-of-the-art civil defense system. Several delegations of Japanese Army officers and bureaucrats visited German air defense facilities in the mid-1930s and again in 1940–41, after the signing of the Axis pact. Japanese officials modeled their Air Defense Law (1937) on Germany’s Air Defense Law (1935), which compelled residents to participate in civil defense activities. Japanese observers moreover admired the Reich Air Defense League (*Reichsluftschutzbund* or RLB), the Nazi regime’s civil defense organization that reached down to the neighborhood level and boasted a mass membership of 22 million by 1943. The RLB clearly inspired the Japanese state’s radical reorganization of the home front in 1939–40. The Home Ministry established block associations (*chōnaikai*) in the cities and beneath them neighborhood associations (*tonarigumi*), comprised of approximately every ten households. The neighborhood associations were organized above all to serve as air-raid defense units, closely resembling the apartment “house” brigades in the RLB. Japanese block associations similarly corresponded to the street associations directed by the Nazi Party’s

70. Reichsminister der Innern, “Abschnitt VII: Brandschutz,” October 19, 1932, *Luftschutz für die Zivilbevölkerung*, Vol. 5, March 1932–June 1933, R32816, IIF Luft, PA.

71. Tsuchida Hiroshige, *Kindai Nihon no “Kokumin bōkū” taisei* (Tokyo: Kanda Gaigo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), pp. 181–82.

72. Ministry of Home Security, *Air Raids: What You Must Know, What You Must Do*, rev. ed. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1941), p. 9.

“block warden” (*Blockwart*) or the RLB’s street warden. Wartime developments in Germany further affected the Japanese home front. In late 1943, Japanese authorities began urgently upgrading the nation’s civil defense structure after receiving reports from their military attachés in Europe of the devastating firebombing of Hamburg and large-scale raids on Berlin. Japanese urban planners, some of whom had recently surveyed the British bombing of German cities, were likewise influential in recommending the dispersion of industries and the creation of firebreaks, which began in 1944.⁷³

My focus on the transnational suggests new approaches to studying the Japanese home front, but the Japanese case may also contribute to global history writ large. Whereas historians of Japan are accustomed to analyzing patterns of emulation, scholars of core European societies generally underappreciate the global, multidirectional circulation of knowledge. German scholars are understandably reluctant to acknowledge transnational influences in the formation of the Nazi regime, lest they appear to be normalizing the Hitler state. Yet the archives of the German Foreign Office reveal that the Nazi state, like the previous Weimar Republic, investigated other countries’ civil defense programs as vigorously as the Japanese. The Nazi-era Air Ministry and Ministry of Interior regularly surveyed air-raid drills and civil defense organizations in Britain, France, Italy, the Soviet Union, the Netherlands, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, and even far-off Japan and China. Nor was the Nazis’ mass civil defense organization, the Reich Air Defense League, entirely new. In 1933, the RLB absorbed two Weimar-era air defense organizations, which in turn had emulated the state-directed air defense leagues in the Soviet Union (Osoaviakhim, established in 1927) and Poland (League for Air and Gas Defense, established in 1929). As German officials noted, many European nations were organizing mass civil defense organizations in the early 1930s. On the eve of World War II, the pace of intra-European intelligence gathering was so frenetic that Britain’s undersecretary of state for home affairs and his foreign intelligence chief made a high-level tour of Germany’s air defense system in January 1938, just weeks before Hitler’s annexation of Austria.⁷⁴

73. Bōei Kenshūjo, *Senshishitsu, Hondo bōkū sakusen*, Senshi sōsho, Vol. 19 (Tokyo: Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1968), pp. 42, 46, 260–61; Tsuchida, *Kindai Nihon no “Kokumin bōkū,”* pp. 228–29, 295–97; Tanabe Heigaku, *Doitsu bōkū, kagaku, kokumin seikatsu* (Tokyo: Sagami Shobō, 1942); Cary Lee Karacas, “Tokyo from the Fire: War, Occupation, and the Remaking of a Metropolis” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006), pp. 53–54, 71–72.

74. For a periodic Air Ministry “press report” on air defense developments in some 20 countries, see Reichsluftfahrtministerium, *Luftschutz-Presserbericht*, no. 17/37 (October 10, 1937), in *Gas- und Luftschutzfragen in Ausland, 1936–1938*, R101487; “Bericht der Deutschen Luftschutz Liga,” attachment to letter, *Deutsche Luftschutz Liga, Direktorium* (Geisler),

Indeed, transnational surveys of home fronts did not circulate simply among allies but also between enemies in wartime. Assisted by its representatives in Germany, the Japanese state most readily observed the home-front techniques of its Axis partners. However, Japanese experts also continued to report on British civil defense activities long after the two countries went to war with each other. As late as 1943 and 1944, the Army's civil defense magazine, *Kokumin bōkū*, featured many stories about British firefighting tactics, shelters, evacuations, and the recruitment of women as first-aid personnel, drivers, and other civil defense workers. As we have seen, Japanese officials had long been interested in British mobilization of civilians in both World War I and the early years of World War II. Prior to the outbreak of war with Britain in December 1941, Japanese diplomats, military attachés, and correspondents in London reported extensively on the British home front. Many observed the Blitz firsthand.⁷⁵ After hostilities broke out between the two island nations, Japanese kept monitoring the British home front from embassies in neutral Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, and nearby Ireland. Even more surprising was the detailed Japanese coverage of Soviet air defense activities during the war. *Kokumin bōkū* frequently reported on the Soviet civil defense organization as well as the substantial mobilization of young women in first-aid activities.⁷⁶

Finally, this study of the transnational home front compels us to think harder about *what* precisely was circulating globally between 1935 and 1945. To many scholars of Japan nowadays, the answer is “fascism.”⁷⁷ There are, however, two problems with the way they apply the concept to Japan. One is chronology. Although individual fascist thinkers and small fascistic movements were active in Japan during the first half of the 1930s, the state did little to radically restructure everyday life. Nearly all of the fundamental transformations of state-society relations began in 1938–40 and continued until 1945. Curiously, those scholars who see “fascism” scarcely *mention the war* that so obviously formed the context for these transformations. The National Total Mobilization Law (*Kokka Sōdōinhō*), which gave the regime sweeping powers over industry and labor, was enacted in April 1938 as officials recognized that the “China Incident” had become a protracted war. The radical reorganization of local life into block and neighborhood

to Geheimrat Frohwein, Auswärtiges Amt, October 21, 1931, in Deutsche Luftschutz Liga, August 1931–October 1932, R32823, IIF Luft, PA.

75. *Kokumin bōkū*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1941), pp. 33–41; Vol. 5, No. 6 (1943), pp. 20–25; Vol. 6, No. 7 (1944), pp. 18–21, 37; also Gaimushō Ō-A-kyoku, *Senjika no Eikoku jijō* (Tokyo: Gaimushō Ō-A-kyoku, daisanka, 1941).

76. See *Kokumin bōkū*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (1943), p. 9.

77. Alan Tansman, ed., *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

associations commenced in 1940, as did the forced dissolution and reconsolidation of the parties, labor unions, and women's groups under the new Imperial Rule Assistance Association. These developments too occurred as authorities mobilized daily life for the expected war with either the Anglo-Americans or Soviets.

The second problem with "fascism" is that it fails to explain the circulation of authoritarian structures to a variety of polities. Gregory Kasza astutely highlights the diffusion of "administered mass organizations"—such as neighborhood associations or "labor fronts"—among Japan, Fascist Italy, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, Communist Yugoslavia, and both Nationalist and Communist China.⁷⁸ I would add Britain to the mix. As wartime Britain confronted German air raids, blockade, and the prospect of invasion, it too mobilized civilians as never before. The "liberal" British state massively conscripted labor, imposed stringent food rationing and savings campaigns, and compelled men and women to serve as civil defense workers when voluntary recruitment failed.⁷⁹ Such was the transnational home front. Japanese studied civilian mobilization in Germany, Britain, and the Soviet Union. The British and Germans constantly adapted aspects of the other's civil defense and food programs, even as they bombed and endeavored to starve each other. And the practitioners of strategic bombing—from Japanese and Nazis to the democratic British and Americans—sought out "best practices" in the campaigns to destroy enemy home fronts. This global fixation with mobilizing, defending, and obliterating civilian life was so much bigger than the phenomenon of "fascism." This was the world of Total War.

Conclusions

What might we learn from my work and others' in writing transnational histories focused on Japan? First, in the effort to excavate transnational connections, we must not "flatten" the differences in our cases.⁸⁰ Wartime Japan's investigations of other nations' home fronts were unquestionably consequential. They emboldened leaders to imagine that resource-poor Japan could continue fighting a "total war" by mobilizing its human resources in

78. Gregory J. Kasza, *The Conscripted Society: Administered Mass Organizations* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

79. See Sheldon Garon, "Defending Civilians against Aerial Bombardment: A Comparative/Transnational History of Japanese, German, and British Home Fronts, 1918–1945," jointly published in *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, Vol. 14, Issue 23, No. 2 (December 1, 2016), and in *Mass Violence and Resistance*, Sciences Po, December 1, 2016, <http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/defending-civilians-against-aerial-bombardment-comparativetransnational-history-japanese-ger>.

80. Hill, *National History*, p. x.

production, homeland defense, and food provision. Nonetheless, transnational learning had its limits. Local conditions necessarily varied. However much the Japanese studied Imperial Germany's mistaken food policies of 1916–18, the learned lessons could not fully prepare them for the Allies' unprecedented naval and air assault on the Japanese food supply in World War II. Similarly, Japanese experts surveyed the impact of air raids on Britain and Germany in the early years of World War II when aerial bombardment was not particularly effective. A well-organized civil defense, they concluded reasonably at the time, would neutralize the enemy's air offensive. Yet Japanese cities had the misfortune to experience bombardment primarily in the last five months of the war, when bombing reached a scale and destructiveness never before seen. Ultimately, disciplined bucket brigades could not stand up to B-29 Superfortresses and napalm. In these and other episodes in transnational history, comparisons are as important as connections.

Second, we will better grasp global transformations the more we broaden the frame. We can only see so much if we restrict ourselves to U.S.-Japanese relations or historical links between Germany and Japan that seemingly dead-end in the Axis. Japanese were inquisitive, and we must follow their minds and bodies around the world as best we can. In so doing, transnational history holds the promise of transcending not only borders but also shopworn debates such as that over "fascism" in Japan.

Most important, we must consider the question of "positionality" in writing transnational history. As Sebastian Conrad observes, most histories of the world are "in some fundamental way locally 'centered.'"⁸¹ They generally envision a globe in which the great intellectual, social, political, and economic forces emanate from western Europe or America to the "periphery." What then might the historian of Japan contribute to global or transnational history? I do not propose that we write alternative world histories centered on Japan or Asia, as many Japanese thinkers have proposed over the past century. On the contrary, we should recognize that Japanese have been important transnational actors in the modern world, and we might more energetically explore their connections to unpack "Europe," the "West," and "Asia" into a myriad of inquisitive nations. Historians of Japan may thus "see" the world as few others can.

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81. Conrad, *What Is Global History?* pp. 162–63.