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German Influence on Historical Scholarship in Meiji Japan - How Significant Was It Really?¹

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Research on the history of modern historical scholarship in Japan tends to emphasize Western and especially German influence. It is true that there are similarities in the way history as a modern academic discipline evolved in both countries, both as a result of similar historical circumstances and direct influence. The formation of the nation state and the emergence of history as a professional academic discipline occurred at the same time in Germany and Japan. National unification came later to Germany than to the other great European powers; the German Empire was founded in 1871, the same year the Meiji government achieved control over the whole of Japan by abolishing the feudal domains and replacing them with prefectures (haihan chiken). German historical scholarship achieved a synthesis of text criticism, work with sources and the concept of the nation as a "unique whole in which spiritual forces bind things together and each element influences the others" (Breisach 1994:229), and provided a model for other European countries and North America. It was introduced to Japan through the person of Ludwig Rieß (1861-1928), who became professor of the new history department at the Imperial University in 1887, and through several Japanese who studied history in Germany and returned to teach it in Japan. History was only one of several areas where Germany became a model for Japan from the 1880s, including the introduction of a parliamentary constitution. The importance of German influence in general has been treated elsewhere;² here it will suffice to say that it was a response to the challenges that Japan faced as a newly-formed nation state that had to be filled with

¹ Most of what is presented in this paper is based on Mehl 1992, Mehl 1998a and Mehl 2000a.
² For example, Ōtsuki 1977:10-11, Martin 1995:17-76.
meaning for its citizens and define its position among the powers - challenges that Germany faced at around the same time.

German influence, however, should not be overrated; if we do so, we may well fail to take into account just how complex historical developments in Japan after 1868 (the accepted date for the beginning of "modern Japan") were in many areas, including historiography. Japan did not have railways, a parliamentary constitution or a national army before it began its massive importation of things western, but it did have a rich tradition of historical writing and historical scholarship. The oldest surviving works, going back to the eighth century, are historical narratives. Textual criticism reached a high standard during the Edo period (1600-1868). Modern historical scholarship resulted from the complex interaction between indigenous historiography and the way it evolved in the nineteenth century as well as the reception of western scholarship. In this paper I propose to de-emphasize German influence while drawing attention to indigenous influences, thus attempting to counteract the bias in research on the subject.

My focus is the Historiographical Institute (shiryō hensanjo) with its predecessors and the departments of history at the University of Tokyo. This is where the modern academic discipline of history first began and from where it spread to other institutions. But it is by no means the only or even the most important place where history was examined and recorded. From the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate there was a widespread popular interest in history, which continued into the Meiji period. Works like Rai Sanyô's Nihon Gaishi (Extra History of Japan, 1827), a literary narrative dealing with the fate of the military houses from the Minamoto and Taira to the Tokugawa, went through several printings in early Meiji, commentaries were written on them and they were used as school textbooks (Ôkubo 1988:69-70, 398 and passim). Publicists who were not employed by the government, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), Taguchi Ukichi (1855-1905), Tokutomi Sohô (1863-1957) and Yamaji Aizan (1864-1917) wrote histories that were widely read. Historical subjects were treated by popular storytellers and in the theatres. In fact it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the distinction between academic and popular history came to be sharply drawn (Mehl 1998b). And it is precisely the relationship between academic and popular history in Japan that shows some distinct characteristics not
found in Germany. For example, historical novels, some based on thorough research and quite "academic" are extremely popular in Japan and (unlike in Germany) far more influential than the works of professional historians.

But the beginnings of mainstream historiography in the Meiji period are also distinct from Germany.

Official Historiography in Japan

Asserting Japan's place as a nation by writing its history was on the Meiji government's agenda from the start. In April 1869, the following imperial rescript was issued:

Historiography is a for ever immortal state ritual (taiten) and a wonderful act of our ancestors. But after the Six National Histories it was interrupted and no longer continued. Is this not a great lack! Now the evil of misrule by the warriors since the Kamakura period has been overcome and imperial government has been restored. Therefore we wish that an office of historiography (shikyoku) be established, that the good custom of our ancestors be resumed and that knowledge and education be spread throughout the land, and so we appoint a president. Let us set right the relations between monarch and subject, distinguish clearly between the alien and the proper (ka'i naigai) and implant virtue throughout our land.³

The rescript expresses the justification of the restoration as ōsei fukko, restoration of imperial rule; the ideal being the imperial bureaucratic state of the Nara and Heian periods. During this period the Six National Histories (Rikkokushi) had been compiled. Thus, following the Chinese tradition of dynastic histories, the compilation of a definite

³ Author's translation from the text quoted in Ōkubo 1988:42. For a brief discussion of it see Héral 1984.
standard history (seishi) came to be regarded as the task of a legitimate government, and in early Meiji the seishi remained the ideal of historiography, just as the imperial bureaucratic state was a political ideal.4

The rescript sanctioned an Office in the gakkō (as the former bakufu institute Shôheizaka gakumonjo was now named), which was the first government institution of higher education in Tokyo and an office for administering education throughout the country. In 1871, after the centralization of government, the office was reopened as the Department of History (rekishika) in the Council of State (dajôkan), the highest executive organ. This was reorganized and renamed the Office of Historiography (shushikyoku) in 1875, just after the Osaka conference had resolved a political crisis, in which the government had to reassert its legitimacy in the face of disagreements within and widespread protest without.

From 1875 onwards the history of official historiography is well documented and we have the first detailed information about who was in the Office. The typical 'historiographer' was born around 1830 and educated in the Confucian tradion, had been politically active around the time of the Restoration and came from one of the domains that had helped overthrow the Bakufu. This profile was probably similar to that of government officials in general; it would appear, however, that appointment to the Office of Historiography was often a sign of waning political influence (Mehl 1998:35-43). The most important member was Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827-1910), who became Deputy Director in September 1875 and was one of the first professional historians in Japan. He came from Satsuma domain, where he had gained experience in writing history by compiling a chronological history of Japan entitled Kôchô seikan, based on the Dainihonshi of Mito and completed 1865. Shigeno was the leading member of the Office of Historiography and its successors until 1893.

During the 1870s, Shigeno and his colleagues did not work on actually writing the history, but concentrated their efforts on collecting primary sources. This appears to have had more to do with government administration than with historiography. The most important collection made at the time is now known as Fuken shiryô (Historical

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4 Sakamoto (1966:29-30) has pointed out the close link between the imperial bureaucratic ritsu ryô state and the Six National Histories.
Materials of the Prefectures) and preserved in the library of the Cabinet in the National Archives (Mehl 1998a:21-3, 49-50). After the centralization of administration in 1871, the prefectures were ordered to submit information relating to recent political, economic and social developments. At the same time a Department of Topography (chishika), also part of the Council of State, had the task of compiling topographic descriptions of the Empire (Kôkoku chishi). Collecting information as a basis for government took precedence over writing a national history in the early years of the Office of Historiography.

Nevertheless, the members of the Office were also searching for an appropriate form for the new national history. They attempted to find out about Western methods of historiography. Since they could not read Western languages and translations were few, knowledge was difficult to obtain. But as opportunity presented itself in 1878, when Suematsu Kenchô (1855-1920) set off for England as a secretary to the Japanese Legation. The Office of Historiography entrusted him with "the investigation of English and French methods of historical compilation". Suematsu embarked on this task with enthusiasm and commissioned the scholar and lecturer Gerge Gustavus Zerffi (1821-92) to write a book on the subject. The Science of History was published in 1879 and duly sent to the Office of Historiography, but it turned out to be of limited use to the members of the Office, who in the end stuck to traditional methods of compiling sources and chronicling events.

In 1881 a political crisis (Meiji jityonen no seihen) occurred that was not dissimilar to the crisis that ended in 1875. The government was again threatened by disunity from within and widespread protest from without; again it reasserted itself by resorting to compromise. Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), who had called for the immediate opening of an elected parliament, was expelled from government; at the same time an edict promised an elected parliament by 1890. In the following years preparations were made for the proclamation of a constitution and the opening of a parliament. While Westernization reached a climax in the "Rokumeikan era", the "conservative 1880s" also saw a revival of Japanese traditions, including the teaching of

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Chinese and Japanese Classics at the department of Classics (koten kōshūka) in the Imperial University and the Institute for Japanese Philology (Kōten kōkyūjo), both founded in 1882 (Mehl 1998a:26-34).

Official historiography became part of these preparations, which were intended to ensure that the constitution would be firmly embedded in and legitimized by Japanese tradition. Progress in the Office appears to have been hampered by underfunding, involvement in too many different tasks and differences of opinion between its members. The Office of Historiography was reorganized to become more hierarchical in structure. The compilation of a chronological history, which had been one of many tasks of the Office, was explicitly named as the central aim. The history, entitled Dainihon hennenshi (Chronological History of Great Japan), was a strictly chronological work, written in Sino-Japanese (kanbun) and covering the period from the 14th century to 1868 (Mehl 1998:81-6). As its title suggests, it was heavily indebted to the Dainihonshō of the late Mito school. It was perceived as a sequel to the Dainihonshō, which came to be recognized as a standard history. The decision to write the new history in kanbun was criticized by scholars and officials who felt that a national history should be written in Japanese. The compilers of the Dainihon hennenshi, however, like the compilers of the Dainihonshō before them, did not perceive writing in kanbun as writing in a foreign language. Kanbun was still the language of scholarship. There is a parallel with Germany here: The Monumenta Germaniae Historica is a prime example of historical scholarship inspired by nationalism, but prefaces and editorial remarks to the early volumes are in Latin (as are of course most of the sources compiled in them), still considered to be the common language of scholarship at the time. Work on the Dainihon hennenshi began in early 1882 and the sources indicate that it was to be completed by 1890.

Thus the future Historiographical Institute began as a government office established to compile an official history of Japan. As the Imperial Rescripts cited above shows, the immediate model for this were the Six National Histories (Rikkokushi), compiled after a series of political reforms in the seventh century had created an imperial bureaucratic state. The models were the political system of China and the dynastic histories written by each new dynasty to chronicle the fall of the previous one.
and legitimate its own rule. Unlike China, the imperial state functioned only for a short time in Japan and with its decline official historiography was abandoned. The Meiji government revived this Chinese and Japanese tradition of historiography sponsored by the government and organized within a government office. It was only given up, when a western-style constitution was adopted.

The beginnings of history as an autonomous discipline

In 1889 the Meiji Constitution was promulgated, and in the same year a department of Japanese history (*kokushika*) was opened at the Imperial University. In 1887 a department of (Western) history (*shigakuka*) had been set up and the German Ludwig Rieβ appointed as the first professor of history. In 1888 the Office of Historiography was moved to the University; thus the former government office became part of the organization of historical scholarship at University level. Its leading members, Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827-1910), Kume Kunitake (1839-1931) and Hoshino Hisashi (1839-1917), became professors of history. Through their colleague Ludwig Rieβ the members of the Institute had the opportunity to learn more about Western methods of historical scholarship, and later his students became members of the Institute.

What did Rieβ contribute to the development of historical scholarship in Japan?⁶ His influence is usually judged to have been significant if not decisive. Rieβ approached Japan and his Japanese students with a relatively open mind, perhaps because he was young and had lived abroad (in England) before. Although he was, like his foreign colleagues, convinced that Western scholarship was superior and that European history was important for his Japanese students, he encouraged them to study Japanese history as well and even did so himself. Rieβ also contributed to the organisation of Japanese historical scholarship at the Imperial University. When he left Japan in 1903 his students were teaching at all the imperial universities and at several private universities.

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⁶ For a more detailed assessment of Rieβ' contribution see Mehl 1998a:97-102.
Nevertheless, Rieß' contribution is usually overrated. Rieß was strongly dependent on his Japanese employers, and his initiatives could not overcome the limits imposed by them. He had a low status; although he was one of the two professors at the Department of History he was not treated as the holder of the second chair, because he was a foreigner. Moreover when assessing Rieß' influence, we must distinguish between Western history and Japanese history, since both have different origins.\(^7\) For many years Japanese history was taught by scholars educated in the Tokugawa period and by their students. Shigeno and his colleagues of the first generation at the Historiographical Institute and the Department of Japanese History were succeeded by Mikami Sanji (1993 assistant professor, 1899-1926 professor) and Hagino Yoshiyuki (1899 lecturer, 1901-1923 professor). Both had graduated from the Department of Classics. Their colleague Tanaka Yoshinari (1892-3, 1895 assistant professor, 1905-1919 professor) had worked his way up in the Office of Historiography. They were succeeded by Rieß' students Kuroita Katsumi and Tsuji Zennosuke. Thus it was only in the third generation that Rieß' students became influential at the Historiographical Institute.

Of course Shigeno and especially Kume had learnt from Rieß, but they were older than Rieß and at the height of their careers and their own commitments would hardly have allowed them to sit next to undergraduates in Rieß' lectures and seminars, even had they wished to do so. Mikami Sanji, who had attended some of Rieß' courses, became Rieß' friend and helped him with his research on Japanese history.\(^8\) When the collection of foreign documents relating to Japan was envisaged, Mikami sought Rieß' advice.\(^9\) This was Rieß' idea and possibly his most significant contribution to the Historiographical Institute. But on the whole, work at the Historiographical Institute continued much in the same way as in the two decades before Rieß' arrival.

In the Department of Japanese History the first generation of professors were members of the Historiographical Institute and former Office of Historiography. They were deeply rooted in the tradition of *kangaku* (Chinese learning). It is highly


\(^8\) Rieß acknowledges Mikami's help in his article about the expulsion of the Portugese (1898-9), where he mentions research done by "my colleague Mikami" (31) and thanks him for his friendly advice (27).

\(^9\) Mehl 1998a:103-112; Mikami 401:79.
significant, but often forgotten that Shigeno Yasutsugu, who today is best known as one of the founders of the modern discipline of Japanese history, was highly respected as a *kangaku* scholar in his time rather than a historian. He was regarded as one of the "three literary men of Meiji", together with two other *kangaku* scholars, one of whom, Kawada Takeshi (1830-96) was for a time also a member of the Office of Historiography (Smith 1959:54). A few years after being dismissed as professor of Japanese history and director of the Historiographical Institute, in 1898, he became a professor of *kangaku* at the University of Tokyo. Shigeno always looked upon China as the source of true learning. A good example of his views is his lecture "Rekishi hensan no hohō o ronzu" (Discussing the methods for compiling a national history, 1879), in which Chinese historiography, especially the definitive standard history (*seishiki*), is treated as the standard by which he measures all works of history (Shigeno 1989:1-8).

In this lecture, given while Suematsu was researching in London for the Office of Historiography, Shigeno also discusses European historiography, but there is no evidence of Western influence on his own work. Another example is his lecture "Gakumon wa tsui ni kōshō ni ki su" (All Scholarship is in the final analysis *kōshō* textual criticism, 1890; Shigeno 1989:1:35-47). Shigeno maintained that the *kōshō* method would remain the basis of all scholarship. Shigeno was however, more than a conservative Confucian scholar. His importance as a *kangaku* scholar has only recently been rediscovered.\(^{10}\)

Kume, Shigeno's most important colleague at the Historiographical Institute, was equally strongly influenced by the *kangaku* tradition. But he had been exposed to Western knowledge early in life, having grown up near Nagasaki and travelled in the West as a member of the Iwakura mission in 1871-3. He was also influenced by the Japanese Enlightenment historians, such as Taguchi Ukichi for whose journal *Shikai* he wrote regularly.\(^{11}\)

The school of history which developed at the Imperial University and became the mainstream of academic history is known as *akademizumu*, characterized by positivism, preoccupation with documents and verifiable facts and closeness to the state.

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\(^{10}\) Tao De-min 1997:373-82; see also Mehl 2000b:56-7.

\(^{11}\) For a discussion of Kume's scholarship see Mehl 1992:180-7; Kondo 1998.
It is influenced by Sino-Japanese methods of textual criticism in the tradition of *kōshōgaku* ("school of verification and proofs"), and by German methods of historical research. *Kōshōgaku* originated in China during the Quing Dynasty (1644-1912) as a branch of Confucian studies consisting of the close examination and interpretation of Confucian classics. In Japan it became part of mainstream Confucianism, and by the late Tokugawa period its methods were applied to the study of Japanese texts. The text-critical approach was similar to the text-critical methods introduced to the study of history by Ranke and his disciples, which were brought to Japan by Rieß, who had studied in Berlin, and Japanese students returning from Germany.

*Akademizumu* claimed to be objective because of its adherence to a strict canon of methods for the verification of historical facts. It did not, however, address the problems of selecting and representing those facts. The scholars at the Institute wanted to write history free from political and moral bias. They believed that if they recorded the historical facts as they were (*ari no mama*) their meaning would become apparent. Of course the work they produced just as much reflected the preconception of the authors as any historical work. One of the first works the office completed was *Nihon shiryaku* (*Outline of the History of Japan*), prepared for the world exhibition in Paris in 1878. It was later revised and published as the *Kokushigan* (*View of Our National History*), which was used as a textbook at the Imperial University and was adapted for use in schools. Although little more than a chronological table of facts, it represented national history as imperial history and as divine history (Ketelaar 1990:192) in the tradition of the ancient chronicles. It can hardly be said to be objective; nor was it what the compilers believed to be historical truth. By starting the *Dainihon hennenshi* where the *Dainihonshi* left off, the members of the Office of History subsequently avoided having to reflect on how to present Japan's earliest history. Nevertheless, the *Dainihon hennenshi* too was in line with earlier histories, most notably the *Dainihonshi*, in that it interpreted Japanese history as imperial history.

Even so the scholars' claim to be objective has to be respected, especially as they held on to it at not inconsiderable cost to themselves. At the time Shigeno and his colleagues were striving to write unbiased history, history played an important part in the formation of a national ideology in the late Meiji period. There was widespread
interest in history, culminating in the "historical fever", diagnosed by the media in the early 1890s (Mehl 1998b). Conflicting demands were made on history and tensions resulted; they found their expression in the widespread indignation aroused by Shigeno Yasutsugu's "obliteration theories" (massatsu ron), the Kume affair of 1892 and the textbook controversy of 1911. Shigeno dismissed many of the stories surrounding popular heroes from Japanese history, especially Kusunoki Masashige, who fought for Emperor Godaigo in the Kemmu Restoration in the 14th century, as fiction. His allegations were widely reported in the press and did much to discredit akademizumu among the public and those political and intellectual leaders who were striving to foster national consciousness among the people (Mehl 1998:121-6).

Kume's article "Shintō is an outdated custom of heaven worship" (Shintō wa saiten no kozoku), published in the popular history journal Shikai in 1892, caused even more outrage (Mehl 1993b). Kume's stated aim was to examine modern religious practices and the origins of heaven worship in the Orient. The content of his article was provocative, for he claimed that Shinto was not a religion, but merely a primitive cult of heaven worship that had evolved during the infancy of mankind. While in other countries heaven worship had been superceded by religions with a dogma and a moral code of behaviour, Japan had still retained its primitive cult. These statements aroused the indignations of the Shintoists and scholars of National Learning, who in their criticism relied on moral rather than scholarly arguments, accusing him of disloyalty towards the imperial house. They used their influence with the government with the result that Kume was dismissed from his post at the Imperial University.

The textbook controversy was centred around the portrayal in the first government history textbook of the Northern and Southern imperial courts during the period of schism in the fourteenth century (nanbokuchō seijunron). It ended with an imperial edict deciding a question of historical interpretation against the judgement of professional historians. Subsequently, even historians such as Mikami Sanji (1865-1939), Shigeno's and Kume's successor at the Historiographical Institute, stressed the difference between historical scholarship and history for educational purposes (Mehl 1998:140-147).

By 1911 the attempt to write a standard history in the tradition of the Six
National Histories had already been abandoned. Following the Kume affair, the Institute had been closed in 1893. The closure was only in part a result of the Kume affair. The lack of progress on the Dainihon hennenshi and the kind of scholarship practised by Shigeno and his colleagues had long been the target of criticism. The scholars had concentrated their efforts on the collection of sources, even after work on the Dainihon hennenshi was begun. The Dainihon hennenshi itself was written in Sino-Japanese and steeped in the traditions of Chinese learning (kangaku), already perceived to be outdated. The Institute was reopened two years later, but now its sole purpose was to collect, arrange and publish documents, a function it fulfils to this day (Mehl 1998:133-140).

In 1901 the publication of sources began with Dainihon shiryō and Dainihon komonjo. The collections are often mentioned in the same breath with Monumenta Germaniae Historica, but they have very little if anything in common with the German source collection, arranged by types of sources, for example historical narratives (scriptores) and laws (leges), which are cited in full length.\(^\text{12}\) In the compilation Dainihon shiryō events are recorded chronologically with year, month and day, and the relevant primary sources cited. This structure goes back to Hanawa Hokiichi's compilation Shiryō at the end of the 18th century. Some details in the method are also reminiscent of earlier compilations: for example, in notes referring to the emperor, the subject of a sentence is omitted.\(^\text{13}\) Although the procedure for including documents has not fundamentally changed since Meiji, younger generations of scholars have attempted to take into account new trends in historical scholarship, such as the increased interest in the history of the common people (minshūshi).\(^\text{14}\)

The compilation Dainihon komonjo has three parts. The first (hennen monjo) consists of decrees by the emperors and abdicated emperors, the Council of State (dajōkan) and the Shoguns as well as documents from military commanders and other individuals. The second part (iewake monjo) contains documents arranged according to

\(^{12}\) On the MGH see Caenegem/Ganshof 1962.

\(^{13}\) Information given by Hōya Tōru, Historiographical Institute, letter dated 4 February 1991.

provenance, from major families or temples. The third part (Bakumatsu gaijoku kankei monjo) contains documents concerning the foreign policy of the Shogunate since 1853. Both, Dainihon shiryō and Dainihon komonjo, are still being continued.

Although these compilations were begun at a time when Western and especially German methods of scholarship had been introduced, it should not be forgotten that the first compilations of historical documents were carried out during the Tokugawa period and that the compilation of sources had been central to the work of the Office of Historiography from the beginning. The scholars involved therefore could and did refer to Japanese as well as foreign precedents.

**Germany as a model for Japan?**

From the above brief outline it should be clear that Japan did not simply follow the German example. For one thing developments were largely contemporaneous. The nineteenth century saw the formation of nation states and the emergence of history as an autonomous discipline in several countries and the case of Japan can be seen as part of this general process. Besides, Japan had its own scholarly and political traditions to derive inspiration from; the idea of the seishi, kōshōgaku and the achievements of scholarship in the Tokugawa period, especially the Dainihonshi and Hanawa Hokiichi's Shiryō, which was the model for all the Office's compilations of sources, including Dainihon shiryō. So how did the German example serve Japan? - Confirmation was probably the most important contribution. German scholarship was most influential where it confirmed existing tendencies, namely the emphasis on objectivity. In part this reflected tendencies in Germany; by the 1880s the focus of historical scholarship had shifted from historical knowledge in narrative form to techniques of research and textual criticism. It was this aspect of German historical scholarship that was most influential abroad, and the one-sided reception of Ranke the "quasi positivist" without

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his interpretation of history and narrative style is not unique to Japan.\textsuperscript{16}

The stress on "scientific" history is one reason why the German example did not help Japan solve one crucial problem. German historiography did not enable Japan to find a framework for interpreting her own history. It did not help Shigeno and his colleagues become interpreters of the nation; their lives and works did not shape the Japanese empire as those of the German historians shaped the German empire.\textsuperscript{17} History was as important to the Japanese as to the German nation; but in Japan it was not the professional scholars at government institutions who provided the kind of history that suited the nation best.\textsuperscript{18} Shigeno and his colleagues saw themselves as engaging in an important task for the government, and Shigeno expressed an interest in Western historical writing as early as 1875. Why then did they fail to complete a history for the new nation?

First, official historiography was too much bound up with the Chinese dynastic tradition; this is why it had never had the same impact in Japan as in China. Shigeno was very much like a Chinese scholar-official who was aloof from the masses. German historians on the other hand saw themselves as spokesmen for the German citizen; their role was to express the will of the people and to "profess" and to make knowledge accessible to everyone.

Second, the typical form of German historicist writing was the epic narrative, indebted to the tradition of history as an art form. In contrast, the typical form of the \textit{akademizumu} school was the positivist article, focusing on textual criticism and isolated facts and addressing a small circle of scholars. Despite their interest in Western historical narrative Shigeno and his colleagues never applied what their investigations revealed to their own work. Their historical compilations took the annalistic form adopted by official historiography for centuries, and their scholarly articles dealt with specific facts and events, usually without relating them to a wider context.

Third, the failure of the Japanese scholar-officials to find an appropriate form


\textsuperscript{17} The following summarizes some of the main points treated in more detail in the final chapter of Mehl 1998a.

\textsuperscript{18} The different kinds of history being written are treated in Mehl 1998b.
for their national history reflected their failure to develop an interpretation of Japan's history which reflected the rapid changes Japan was experiencing and did justice to her new situation and position in the world. An answer for this problem only emerged in the following generation with the concept of tōyōshi, which gave Japan both an Asian past and a position of superiority within Asia (Tanaka 1993).

Closely tied up with the problem of interpretation is what was perhaps the ultimate problem; the dilemma of Hidemaro in Mori Ōgai's novel *As if* (*Kano yō ni*): How could the historian write a history that clearly distinguished between myth and fact and yet preserve the myths that give meaning to the nation? How could Shigeno and his colleagues reconcile their view that historians must be free from political and moral bias with their belief that history had a vital part to play in fostering a sense of nation and providing orientation? The problem is not simply one of "objectivity" versus bias; objectivity is unattainable, because any representation of history, including the annalistic form adopted for the *Dainihon hennenshi* and the *Dainihon shiryō*, involves choices that are not "given" by the material itself.

In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century both German and Japanese historians had given up trying to address this dilemma and retreated into the accumulation of sources and the verification of facts. And in both countries this failure to address the relationship between historical facts and their representation resulted in historical scholarship being all too vulnerable to distortion for the ends of nationalist ideology.

**Conclusion**

The importance of Western and particularly German influence on the formation of modern academic disciplines, including history, cannot be denied. The development of historical scholarship as an academic discipline, with a defined area of study, a canon of methods and organizational structures as it was promoted by Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) and his disciple Heinrich von Sybel (1817-1895) became the model for other western countries as well as for Japan.
However, more than historical methodology it may well have been the function of historiography in legitimizing the nation state which attracted Japanese scholars and officials when they looked towards German historical scholarship for inspiration. Historical studies in Germany developed in parallel to the nation state and were inspired by the search for national identity, that is by political and ideological, rather than scholarly concerns. National unification came later to Germany than to its neighbours. The founding of the German empire in 1871 created the framework for the development of a national state that was accepted by its citizens (Mommsen 1990:12-13).

Historicism, which became the dominant school of historical writing, was well suited to give meaning to the nation state. Historicism emphasizes the uniqueness and value of each situation and people in a given time and place and explains everything, including the nation, as a natural outcome of its past development.19 This would have made historicism attractive to the Japanese, since it offered the possibility of interpreting Japan's development as individual and unique without comparing it unfavourably to allegedly more advanced nations.

The parallel developments in the history of historiography in Germany and Japan continue into the postwar period. There are, for example, similarities in the themes that draw the attention of researchers; in both countries there is a strong preoccupation with the history of the nation. Presumably this results both from the similar conditions in both societies and from the lingering effects of the German role in the development of modern historical scholarship in Japan.20

But however important German influence may have been in general, in the particular case of historical research in the Department of History and the Historiographical Institute at the University of Tokyo it is frequently overestimated. While there is evidence that Shigeno and his colleagues were interested in western historiography and sought to learn from it, there is no evidence that they actually applied what they had learnt to their own work. Their critical evaluation of traditional historiography and their decision to concentrate on collecting primary sources predates

19 For an excellent discussion of historicism see Jaeger/Rüsen 1992.
20 The history of German and Japanese historical scholarship from 1945 to 1960 is treated in Conrad 1999a.
Rieß' arrival in Japan. Several earlier tendencies can be identified, but one decisive step came when the members of the Office of Historiography decided to begin the *Dainihon hennenshi* not with the end of the fourteenth century where the *Dainihonshiki* left off, but to duplicate coverage of the fourteenth century, thereby critically examining existing historical narratives and comparing them with primary sources. In the early 1880s members of the Office of Historiography began to travel extensively in order to collect documents from all over Japan (Mehl 1998a:87-93). By the time the Office moved to the University and Shigeno, Kume and Hoshino became professors of Japanese history they and their colleagues had been engaged in historical research for several years and had developed their own methods. Their contemporaries did not necessarily perceive these methods to be western; in fact the "backwardness" of these scholars was perceived to be one of the reasons for the temporary closure of the Historiographical Institute in 1893 (Mehl 1998a:132, 133-6; 1998b:73-4).

Why then is Rieß' influence so often exaggerated? I suspect that the way it is emphasized by Japanese scholars is in itself an example of history (here the history of the discipline) written for legitimation. During the Meiji period and beyond, Japan's ambition was to become a modern nation. Modernization was equated with Westernization, and the adoption of Western methods of scholarship was therefore seen as a sign of progress. Thus the way the history of historiography in Japan has been written reflects an interpretation of modernity which uses the West and particularly Europe as its yardstick. More important for historiography than the importation of methods of historical scholarship was the adoption of European models to explain the course of Japanese history, including the history of historiography. According to this view of history, Japan is seen as developing in the same direction as Europe, but with a time lag. As a result of focusing on this linear development, elements that do not fit into the model are overlooked; for example in the history of historiography in the Meiji period historical research and writing that shows little or no western influence is neglected. The same is true of the whole discipline of *kangaku*, which represented the scholarly background Shigeno and his colleagues came from.

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21 The following argument was suggested by Conrad 1999b.

22 On the history of *kangaku* (Chinese learning) in the Meiji period see Mehl 2000b.
To conclude, while the influence of Western and German methodology on the discipline of Japanese history has been overrated, the influence of the European framework of interpretation on Japanese historiography has been neglected. Future research comparing Japanese and Western historiography should be more critical of the interpretative framework and more aware of those developments that have been neglected because they do not fit into it.
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