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The field of German-Asian Studies is burgeoning, including a renewed interest in the relationship between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Until recently, however, most such scholarship has tended to focus on international diplomacy rather than transcultural or intellectual exchange between German and Japanese politicians and intellectuals. Certainly there has been no work in the field comparable to John Dower’s classic study of mutual Anglo-American and Japanese perceptions before and during the Second World War. Transnational Nazism thus fills an important gap in the literature, examining, in Law’s words, the “missing link” that bridged cultural traffic and political affinity not in government archives but among artefacts generated by German and Japanese civil societies.

The first half of the book surveys Japanese perceptions of Germany and Nazism throughout the popular mass media, academic life, nonfiction, and language textbooks. While left-leaning intellectuals were critical of fascism in the interwar period, escalating militarism and nationalism in Japanese political culture, combined with the Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler’s seizure of power, created a growing fascination with National Socialism. The second half of the book examines “transnational Nazism” in Germany, namely German affinities toward Japanese culture, nationalism, and imperialism, examining similar sources and associations. Incipient German interest in Japanese politics and culture grew substantially after Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Law argues, and especially after 1933, when the “rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology fundamentally transformed Japanese-German relations by triggering a phenomenon” called “transnational Nazism.”

Daniel Hedinger finds much to recommend in Law’s analysis, including its pre-Axis chronology, “cultural-historical approach,” and conscious departure from “nationalized historiographies” which tends to dismiss the Axis as a “hollow alliance.” At the same time, Hedinger wonders whether there is a direct connection between ideas that percolate across civil society and foreign policy decisions, especially in authoritarian states like Imperial Japan and the Third Reich. If such affinities failed to help “consummate the alliance” after 1936, as Law suggests, how important were they? Hedinger also asks whether the concept of “transnational Nazism” creates more theoretical problems than it resolves, insofar as Japan consumed ideas from Germany with considerably greater alacrity than the Third Reich inculcated ideas from Japan. Finally, Hedinger wishes for more engagement with Italy, which was the progenitor of fascism. By rejecting the idea that Imperial Japanese nationalism, militarism, and authoritarianism belong to a “new global history of fascism,” Hedinger suggests, Transnational Nazism ostensibly reproduces some of the Eurocentric assumptions it is ostensibly working against.

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4 See Ricky Law’s Response below.
Stefan Ihrig agrees that Transnational Nationalism is a "pioneering study," welcoming in particular Law’s analysis of the "transnational side of the great interwar political laboratory." Like Hedinger, however, Ihrig questions whether the concept of "transnational Nazism" effectively captures the phenomena Law describes. There "were no real transnational Nazi actors," Ihrig offers in response, "and there is nothing to suggest that we have something that goes beyond images or perceptions. On the Japanese side, it is more about an acquisition and translation than about an independent entity acting in a transnational fashion." The Nazis certainly took a selective interest in, and occasionally appropriated, elements of Japanese culture and intellectual life to reinforce their own foreign policy and worldview. But there is little evidence that "German Nazis saw in Japan a sort of Japanese Nazism taking shape." Like Hedinger, Ihrig remains curious as to how "transnational Nazism" played out beyond 1936.

Walter Skya’s detailed engagement with Law’s arguments reinforces the sense that Transnational Nazism is both important and provocative. In contrast to Hedinger, who feels that "transnational Nazism" may be too exclusive in dismissing Japanese fascism, Skya wonders whether it actually constitutes a "misappropriation of a European ideology," which fails to capture Japan’s own distinct ideology of "radical Shintō ultranationalism." Indeed, were there any ideological cross-pollination, Skya suggests, it was by western fascists who were inspired by Shinto nationalism and not vice versa. Nazis and Shinto ultranationalists both hated Communism and liberalism, of course, and "all other globalist ideologies and religions that inherently contained an anti-Volkish view of the world." But Skya is not "totally convinced that this relationship enabled Japanese and Germans to identify with each other in an imagined community." The “Japanese could never really integrate into the Third Reich,” Skya concludes, just as “Germans could never be accepted as full-fledged Japanese in the Japanese Shintō state. Ethnic racism was at the core of both ideologies. This cordial relationship could only be maintained from a distance.”

In responding to Hedinger and Ihrig’s queries regarding extending the analysis past 1936, Law argues that there is a law of diminishing scholarly returns since "German-Japanese cultural interactions became more politicized and were the subject of purposeful propaganda" after the Comintern Pact. In response to all three commenters’ concerns about the explanatory value of "transnational Nazism," Law reiterates that his study is “not a book on fascism – generic, Italian, or Japanese.” Rather it examines the impact of one ideology, Nazism (that is, National Socialism, not generic national socialism), on interwar Japanese-German relations." Law doesn’t deny the appeal of fascism to many Germans or Japanese. But he notes that the affinities observed here were generally independent of discussions of fascism, certainly Italian fascism, before the Anti-Comintern Pact. It’s not that the Japanese or Germans were unaware or even hostile toward the Italian Benito Mussolini’s long experiment (1922-1943) with fascism. They simply didn’t find it as appealing or germane to their own racial and imperial aspirations. Hence “transnational Nazism” remains the best way to describe the affinities between Germany and Japan, which were neither sufficiently generalizable as to fall under the penumbra of “fascism” nor sufficiently particular to render the concept moot.

Participants:

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Eric Kurlander is the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Modern European History at Stetson University. Kurlander earned his BA from Bowdoin College and his MA/Ph.D. from Harvard University. His books include Hitler’s Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich (Yale, 2017), Living With Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich (Yale, 2009), The Price of Exclusion: Ethnicity, National Identity, and the Decline of German Liberalism, 1898-1933 (Berghahn, 2006) and two co-edited volumes, Revisiting the ’Nazi Occult’: Histories, Realities, Legacies, with Monica Black (Camden House, 2015) and Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the 19th and 20th Centuries, with Joanne Miyang Cho and Douglas McGetchin (Routledge, 2014). His current projects include a textbook, Modern Germany: A
Global History (under contract with Oxford University Press) and a monograph Before the Final Solution: A Global History of the Nazi “Jewish Question.”

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The current crisis of Western democracies has brought to our minds the interwar period with its catastrophes and calamities. As a result, the Axis and its history increasingly come into view; after 1932 and for about one decade, Germany, Japan, and Italy were the primary beneficiaries of the global chaos they caused. Thus, the release of Ricky W. Law’s *Transnational Nazism* is well timed, as it examines the prehistory of the alliance between two of the main partners of the Axis. The focus of the book is on German-Japanese cultural relations from 1919 to 1936, when a formal alliance between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan finally took shape with the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in late November that year. In doing so, *Transnational Nazism* fills a research gap. For even though the Axis powers plunged the world into war, the shared history of the alliance is still poorly examined. Two factors account for this. The first is the emergence of domesticated, singularized, and nationalized interpretations of history of the former Axis countries after the end of the war. To this day, we are still dealing with three of the most nationalized historiographies. Thus, comparatively few studies have focused on the history of the alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. Second, the Axis has been belittled, as it has been described as a “hollow” or “bogus alliance,” a “sandcastle,” or a “powerless, international grimace.”

This too, leaves little room for a shared history of German-Japanese relations of the interwar period. *Transnational Nazism* is based on an impressive range of source materials. The publisher announced the book as the first study of interwar German-Japanese relations “to employ sources in both languages.” This claim is somewhat overblown. At least in German or Japanese, monographs which do just that have been around for quite some time. One could, perhaps, interpret this statement as a late consequence of the total defeat of the Axis powers, for neither German nor Japanese are global languages, and global research hierarchies are dominated by others. Be that as it may, the truly innovative aspects of Law’s book lies elsewhere. One is its period of investigation. The years before the actual alliance and especially the 1920s have so far received even less attention than the rest of the history of the Axis. The second concerns its methods. The cultural-historical approach of the book deliberately departs from the previously dominant focus on diplomatic and political history in Axis studies. In the last few years a similar shift has appeared concerning the Berlin-Rome relationship. Here, from a cultural-historical perspective, Law describes how nationalists in Japan and Germany became mutual admirers in the 1930s, stating that “this admiration is evidence of a ‘transnational Nazism’ that enabled Japanese and Germans to identify with each other and imagine a binational community before their governments forged the alliance” (1-2). This cultural-media convergence, so the thought-provoking thesis states, not only predated the alliance of 1936 but also provided the basis

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7 For the Berlin-Rome Axis, see, for example, Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
for it. In this sense, the Axis was ideologically driven and not a pragmatic “marriage of convenience”, as the older literature has framed it.8

The book is divided into two parts. The first examines the Japanese perspective on interwar Germany, and the second offers the German perspective of Japan. Each part consists of four chapters focusing on a specific media genre, usually covering the entire period under investigation. The history of German-Japanese relations is thus told from multi-directional perspectives, but in sequence rather than in parallel. Additionally, the technologies of the exchange that were subject to radical transformations throughout the interwar period, such as aviation, telecommunication, and film, are carefully considered.

The first half of Law’s monography demonstrates how constant, profound, and overwhelmingly positive the coverage on the German Reich was in Japan. It examines in detail the daily newspapers’ prioritization of stories focusing on the ‘personalities’ of the Reich. The first personality lionized in Japanese media was Wilhelm II, with the ex-Kaiser’s fate, and, in particular, the question of a possible political comeback absorbing much space in the reporting on post-war Germany. As speculation died down during the 1920s, however, focus shifted to President Paul von Hindenburg and, ultimately, to the Führer, Adolf Hitler. The fate of the Reich also featured prominently in lectures, political pamphlets, and non-fiction books. In the early years of the post-war period, the question of what lessons the Japanese Empire could draw from the Reich’s defeat predominated. During those years, political convergence, or perhaps even an alliance, was still a long way off. The last chapter of the first part is dedicated to language textbooks, an unexpected but all the more exciting medium. Law shows how after 1933, the new order of Nazism somehow mutated into grammatical learning examples. Without direct pressure from the Reich, many Japanese ‘language teachers became transnational Nazis when they voluntarily glorified Nazi ideology and Hitler’ in their textbooks (163).

With the electoral successes of the NSDAP in the early 1930s, interest in the party and its leader increased dramatically in Japan. At that time, a standard transcription of his name was established: Adorufu Hitorā. In the previous decade, when interest in the failed putschist was still small, different versions had existed. Now, he did not need much further introduction, as his first biography in Japanese appeared in 1931. Furthermore, the following year saw the first translation of Mein Kampf. At the time of the “seizure of power,” the Japanese public was as well, if not better, informed about the rise and goals of the NSDAP as many readers of Germany’s European neighbors. At the same time, the Führer was commercialized in Japan. In 1934 a Japanese businessman tried to trademark a bicycle in his name, an endeavor which failed miserably after the German Embassy intervened (1). Others were more successful; Momo Minosuke, for example, who was presumably the first Japanese person to have met with Hitler, was able to capitalize on his brief meeting with the Führer in September 1930 by embarking on a lecture series throughout Japan upon his return. In those years, the Japanese discourse on Nazism was thus focused on the figure of the Führer. There is nothing particularly unique in all of this. Such was the case in Japan regarding Mussolini and Italian fascism by the late 1920s, and the somehow contradictory tendencies towards commercialization and sacralization at the same time were also a shared fate of the fascist dictators in Europe.9 What is noteworthy, however, is the Japanese media’s lack of sympathy for the struggling Weimar Republic, as is the increasingly steady pro-national-socialist attitude that is observable from the early 1930s on. As Law shows, “opinion-makers used

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remaining liberalism in Japan to applaud rising authoritarianism in Germany” (31). In the years following the “seizure of power,” the last critical voices against National Socialism ultimately disappeared.

The second part of Transnational Nazism examines German attitudes towards Japan. Law discusses films and newsreels in addition to newspapers and non-fiction books. The slightly different ensemble of media sources is based on an asymmetrical perception: as only a few dozen Germans could read or speak Japanese without difficulty, neither politics nor money could be made in the Reich with Japanese language textbooks, nor with lectures or pamphlets on domestic political turmoil in Japan. This resulted is a far less detailed and differentiated perception of Japan in Germany than vice versa. Here a paradox becomes visible, one which would later shape the history of the alliance. During the 1930s, Japan was much further away from Germany than the other way around. Given this perception of distance, a catalogue of clichés of exotic Japan featuring such classical figures and sights as samurai, geisha, temples, and shrines predominated throughout the German media coverage of their future wartime partners.

Nevertheless, such essentialized images were only part of the story, as Japan did not make it to the front of the newspapers because of its idealized past, but rather for its bloody present in the context of the “Manchuria crisis.” Thus, at certain moments in time, interest in Japan suddenly rose dramatically in the Reich. This was especially true during the first battle of Shanghai in early 1932, and Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nation one year later. In those instances, German cinema audiences were shown newsreels which demonstrated how others overcame the post-war order militarily and politically. The violent challenge to the Versailles-Washington system not only catapulted Japan to the front pages of German newspapers. Before 1933 the sympathies of the German left lay with the Chinese Republic, while the political right admired Japanese imperialism. Law argues that “the foreign war fused with the domestic political struggle in which Nazis, socialists, and communists bludgeoned one another verbally and physically, so that Manchuria stretched to the streets of Berlin” (190). The result was a lasting politicization of the image of imperial Japan.

Given Law’s provocative theses, Transnational Nazism raises as many questions as it answers. In terms of their range, they probably go beyond the scope of a single monograph. Nevertheless, they are worth discussing, particularly as they concern a global history of fascism and the origins of the Second World War. First, the book raises questions with regard to the genesis of the Axis. Law’s central thesis is that the media exchange between the two countries “anticipated” the alliance and, by doing so, paved the way for it. For him, “words and activities in civil society helped shape German-Japanese mutual perceptions and so promote transnational Nazism” (2). This implies some kind of an ‘alliance from below,’ which, socially speaking, was much broader than has previously been thought, and which was years ahead of the actual political-military ‘entente from above.’ All this is highly thought-provoking but remains little elaborated. Especially in the case of Nazi Germany, such a reading opens up many questions since the notion of a civil society that promoted foreign policy from below contradicts most established interpretations of the power structures and decision-making processes of the Reich. Could it really be that the alliance was, to paraphrase Ian Kershaw, “written towards” the Führer? It will take more than a few newspaper articles and media statements to answer this question. Instead, the older diplomatic history of the alliance would have to be systematically combined with cultural-historical approaches, which the book does not provide.

Second, the book concludes abruptly in 1936. What happens thereafter? For the time before the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, the ideological affinity of both countries is emphasized. One wonders whether Law’s findings can also be applied to the years of the alliance. The book does not engage much in the second half of the 1930s and early 1940s, and concludes with the thesis that the distances between the partners did not shrink after that, but, rather, that persistent differences and distances characterized the alliance (293, 296). The notion that Japan and Germany did not consummate the alliance and remained at a distance corresponds to classical readings of the relationship.11 There is some palpable tension

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11 Sommer, Deutschland. Meskill, Hitler and Japan.
here. For the period before 1936, Law’s book implies a new interpretation of the history of German-Japanese relations based on a cultural-historical approach and emphasizing shared ideology; for the years thereafter, Law’s interpretation suggests the conventional story.

Third, the catchphrase Transnational Nazism raises more questions than it answers, partly because the ideological component of the Alliance ultimately remains vague and under-theorized. The notion of Transnational Nazism also points to the fact that the book intentionally relies on an asymmetrical comparison (17). However, this asymmetry is both premise and result at once. The ideological component of the convergence is thus entirely prescribed in the Reich. Where the Japanese side becomes a willing recipient of National Socialism, the German side “controlled whom to admit and accommodate in their weltanschauung” (301). Attributing the ideological influence and thinking a priori to one side is, however, questionable. Surely the distances were not the same, and German influences where felt more directly in Japan than the other way around. That does not mean that it was a one-way street. Moreover, especially for the period under consideration here, the passive and receiving role fits poorly with the reality of the Japanese Empire. Those were not the days of a German doing and Japanese watching. In the years before 1936, it was more often exactly the opposite, as the overcoming of the post-war order began in East Asia. Thus, the focus of research into Axis relations has lately shifted to the imperial peripheries and the impact that they had on the emergence of the Axis alliance.12 Law’s book also points to this imperial nexus by showing that the German side ‘discovered’ Japan mainly in the context of the Manchurian crisis. However, the methodological challenges and implications of such empirical findings are not further developed.

Finally, and in connection with this, the catchword Transnational Nazism also categorically excludes the third power in the league - Italy. Nevertheless, it was precisely during the book’s period of examination that that Italian fascism developed its greatest global appeal. Concerning the history of the NSDAP before 1933, such processes are now well documented. Even in Japan, the ‘Italian model’ temporarily enjoyed at least as much approval as the German one. In the end, however, Japan’s adoption of Western fascism turned out to have been highly selective anyway. This said, it is still not so easy to conclude that fascism failed in Japan, as Law does. One could instead argue, that there, as elsewhere, the emphasis one’s own particularities made Japanese fascists to real fascists in the first place. However, in this context, Law claims that “fascism with Japanese characteristics’ seems so sui generis that the label ‘fascism’ loses its synthesizing purpose” (12). This is in line with the older, predominantly Western reading of interwar Japan, which tried to exclude Japan a priori from the history of fascism.13

A new global history of fascism, which is still in its beginnings, points in another direction, investigating hybridizations, relocations, and mutual gravitation. Conventional notions of center and periphery, ‘European original’ and ‘non-European copy,’ which have long dominated comparative fascist studies, are thereby increasingly questioned by scholars.14 In this context, it seems that the history of the Axis can no longer be easily reduced to a bilateral and, at the same time, asymmetrical history of reception. As such, the transnational aspects of fascist ideologies in Transnational Nazism ultimately remain under-illuminated, despite, or perhaps because of, the terminology used in the title.

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Germany and Japan were half a world apart, yet they found a way to each other in the 1930s. An imagined commonality of political spirit was the key here. Real, actual exchange and contact was very limited, as Ricky Law describes in his book about German-Japanese relations between 1919 and 1936. This study is not focused on foreign office documents but rather investigates the media, publishing industry, lectures, and films. It is a study of how the ‘other’ was imagined. Law’s book is thus part of a scholarly recent trend to go beyond classic approaches to bilateral relations. The realm of reporting and imagination is not of secondary importance in the relations of the Nazis with the wider world. It is rather crucial, especially if one wants to understand how and why Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan could develop an interest in working together.

The interwar period was a great laboratory of politics and governance in Europe. New constitutional rules, mass politics, and new challenges – real and imagined – apparently called for new solutions. In this age of mass media, journalists, political actors, societies as a whole examined developments across the globe, daily, to see how others were dealing with current challenges. It is not surprising that Nazism and many other fascist and far right movements and systems also looked for inspiration and like-mindedness abroad.

The transnational side of the great interwar political laboratory remains under-researched. We still know too little about the entangled relationship between Italian Fascism and National Socialism, let alone of all the other movements. Transnational Nazism promises to close this gap and to motivate more research on similar entangled relationships.

Law is right to stress that in such a context, public discourse was important as “few could afford first-hand interaction” (2). Public discourse is and was always important, even for cases where there is a lot of actual and direct physical interaction. Public discourses and images develop their own force; they structure and pre-structure behavior and ideas.

Law investigates this transnational entanglement in eight chapters, four of each which are devoted to one side. In the chapters on the image and influence of Nazism on Japan, he investigates the press (chapter one), lectures and pamphlets (chapter two), nonfiction writing (chapter three), and language textbooks (chapter four). Partially mirroring this selection, he proceeds to look at Germany with chapters on Japan in newspapers (chapter five), films (chapter six), nonfiction (chapter seven), and associations (chapter eight).

In his chapters on Japan, he shows how large sections of the Japanese newsmen and others became fans and champions of Nazism. He also shows how Germany and the Third Reich became ubiquitous topics. What he is investigating here were not marginal topics or trends in these years. Germany as a newspaper topic had a tradition in Japan. As Law writes, there was a “baseline of familiarity with Germany” (38) from the time before Nazi leader Adolf Hitler came to power.

Furthermore, there was something universally important for “Japanese opinion makers and intellectuals” when discussing Germany: they “saw Germany as a test case for the global ideological struggle between left and right” (71). Finally, it was thought to be important for Japan to understand the perceived German recovery after World War I in order to identify what could be learned from it.

Law’s discussion of Germany shows that Japan was more marginal in German discourses than was the case the other way around. He also discusses the impact of Japan’s actions in China on the press in the last years of Weimar; they polarized the debate. The Nazi Party had already emerged as a pro-Japanese voice. Once the Nazis came to power, the overall reporting on Japan was brought in line. The Nazis now also employed the German media to flatter and woo Japan. As with other

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cases, the Nazis highlighted what they liked and ignored or played down aspects they did not like or that conflicted with their own views and goals.

Law captures these positive media discourses with his term ‘transnational Nazism.’ While this concept sounds interesting, it is never really fleshed out in this book. There were no real transnational Nazi actors and there is nothing to suggest that we have something that goes beyond images or perceptions. On the Japanese side, it is more about an acquisition and translation than about an independent entity acting in a transnational fashion.

The Nazis constantly examined world events and recent history to identify movements and developments that were compatible with their own modernity, to convince their readers and followers that theirs was the way of/to the future. While they were not very successful in identifying much by way of similar movements in relation to their version of antisemitism, they had more luck when it came to revisionist, expansionist, and anti-democratic developments. Throughout the 1930s, the Nazi press did its best to convey the feeling that the maps of the world are being redrawn and that the old system is dying. It is not surprising that Japan would be part of this endeavor in the Nazi press.

The term ‘transnational Nazism’ seems to suggest that the German Nazis saw in Japan a sort of Japanese Nazism taking shape. This, however, is not demonstrated in the book, which then begs the question what analytical benefit such a term has.

Ricky Law has to be applauded and thanked for carrying out such an extensive discursive mapping across many spheres of discourse and many source categories. This is time-consuming and difficult. We may regret that the study stops in 1936, as we would expect things to become even more interesting in the years that follow. Law’s is a pioneering study which had to grapple with a vast sea of materials. We need to understand the need for selection and hope for a sequel.
In the foreword to his famous book *The Second World War*, the military historian Sir John Keegan wrote “The Second World War is the largest single event in human history, fought across six of the world’s seven continents and all its oceans. It killed fifty million human beings, left hundreds of millions of others wounded in mind or body and materially devastated much of the heartland of civilization.” Despite the fact that seventy-five years have passed since the end of this greatest war in human history, and the thousands of books written about it, there are still massive holes in the historiography. One of the most neglected aspects of the war is the German-Japanese relationship. Incredible as it may seem, there is almost nothing written on this in the English language. One of the major problems is that most scholars of European history know little about the history of modern Japan, while, on the other hand, those who work on Japan do not have an in-depth knowledge of European history. Still more, very few scholars have a solid grasp of both the German and Japanese languages. But with this publication, a solid scholarly work from a cultural-historical perspective on the interwar era of the German-Japanese relationship has finally appeared.

In *Transnational Nazism: Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919-1936*, Ricky W. Law “explores how nationalists in Japan and Germany became mutual admirers in the 1930s” (1). He argues that this mutual admiration is evidence of a “transnational Nazism” that “enabled Japanese and Germans to identify with each other and imagine a binational community before their governments forged the alliance [in 1936]” and that this transnational Nazism constituted an ideological outlook (1–2). Further, he asserts that “Nazism was transnational because [Nazi leader Adolf] Hitler and his messages resonated with non-Germans on the one hand, and because German Nazis and their movement allowed for the limited accommodation of non-Aryan foreigners, in this case the Japanese, on the other” (2). What greatly fostered this mutual admiration in the national consciousness in both countries was the interaction between Germany and Japan in the interwar period—through newspapers, films, lectures and pamphlets, non-fiction writings, language textbooks, and voluntary associations. Finally, Law enters into the long-going academic debate on whether prewar Japan was “fascist.” Paraphrasing Alfred Vagts, he states: “I posit that the essence of fascism is a domination of the ideological man over the civilian and even military man,” and that “Transnational Nazism argues that just as there were Japanese fascists, some Japanese became adherents of Hitler and Nazism, though of course Japan did not turn Nazi” (12).

The book is evenly divided into two parts consisting of a total of eight chapters: Part I, consisting of four chapters on Nazism in Japan, and Part II, consisting of four chapters on transnational Nazism in Germany. Chapter 1 discusses how Japanese attitudes toward Germany were broadly shaped by Japanese newspapers reporting on Germany. Law writes that “Newspapers were unrivaled in disseminating information and molding opinions in interwar Japan” (29). Germany, Nazi policies, and Germans were portrayed in Japanese newspapers during this period. In Chapter 2, which is titled “Germany in Lectures and Pamphlets,” Law notes that “After newspapers, lectures and pamphlets were the most convenient sources of information on Germany in interwar Japan” (67).

In Chapter 3, “Germany in Nonfiction,” Law argues that depictions of Germany in interwar Japanese nonfiction writings can be lumped into two phases. The first was in the liberal 1920s during the Weimar period and the second was in the 1930s and the Nazi era. It was this second stage that marked the ascent of transnational Nazism in Japan. While leftist Japanese intellectuals were critical of the Nazis, many other Japanese were fascinated with Hitler and the Nazi movement. Murobuse Kōshin’s 1940 bestselling Japanese translation of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* were blockbusters. Law states that the essence of transnational Nazism in Japan was “admiration for Nazi Germany without necessarily advocating the Nazification of Japan” (128). Chapter 4 “investigates German learning in Japan and language textbooks’ depictions of Germany as factors in Japanese-German relations” (134).

The second half of the book, Part II, “Transnational Nazism in Germany,” examines how Japan was portrayed in German newspapers, films, nonfiction, and voluntary associations. In Chapter 5 Law writes that “newspapers were the predominant media format for spreading knowledge and opinions in interwar Germany” (167). Three phases marked the coverage in Japan: from the Armistice in 1918 to the Japanese conquest of Manchuria in 1931; from 1931 to 1933; and the third phase which began in 1933 when the Nazis assumed power. Roland Strunk, SS leader, writer, and reporter for the Nazi newspaper Völkischer Beobachter, dedicated a series of articles in 1935 to Nogi Maresuke, who defeated the Russians at Port Arthur in the Russian-Japanese War in 1905, referring to him as “Japan’s Clausewitz” and the “Hindenburg of the Japanese people” (199). Law notes that the Völkischer Beobachter also “revered the emperor as a bulwark against ‘family-destroying communism’ and ‘parliamentary capitalism’” (199). This, of course, illustrates the ideological affinity between German Nazis and what I call Japanese radical Shintō ultranationalists in that they were both against Communism and liberalism. In other words, their fundamental bond was based on the fact that they had the common enemy in liberal democratic and Communist states. Also, Law quotes Alfred Rosenberg, editor of Völkischer Beobachter and one of the most influential ideologues of the Nazi Party, stating:

The National Socialist movement is of the belief that from the outset faraway Japan understood and appreciated the endeavors of Germany’s revival, and we hope that Japanese culture, willfully standing in our current lifetime but also firmly rooted in its millennia of ancient character, will also blossom anew out of the great spiritual struggles. In this spirit, old-young Germany greets old-young Japan (200-201).

Chapter 6 examines the knowledge that Germans gained of Japan through the role of German newsreels, documentaries, and movies. Law argues that “film contributed to German-Japanese convergence by providing a stage for transnational Nazi filmmakers to imagine Japan [as being] ideologically acceptable and for the two countries to collaborate on joint projects” (206). While the German media generally had a negative view of Japan’s takeover of Manchuria in 1931 and condemned Japan’s aggression abroad, after the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, “instead of criticizing Japan’s insatiable ambition [overseas], newsreels now used the Sino-Japanese conflict’s intermittent nature to report Japan winning battle after battle” and illustrated “Germany’s approving attitude toward Japanese militarism” (214).

Chapter 7, “Japan in Nonfiction,” focuses on German writings on Japan by diverse authors, including Hitler himself in Mein Kampf, missionaries in Japan, who generally praised the achievements of Japan, German academics, authors of travelogues that mentioned Japan, and German ideologues. Law writes that “In Mein Kampf... Hitler "denigrated the Japanese as a ‘culture carrying’ folk suited only for aping the ‘culture generating’ Aryans” (235). But by the 1940s Hitler spoke of Japan as a “first rank military power” and the Berlin-Tokyo Axis as the “greatest guarantee of German security” and “conceded that the German navy could learn from its Japanese counterpart” (235). Law also discussed writings on Japan by German academics, mentioning the writings of Heinz Corazza, a Nazi propagandist, specifically his book Japan: Wonder of the Sword. Corazza saw German and Japan confronting the same enemy forces:

The same forces that encircled Germany in 1914 are feverishly baiting and mobilizing against Germany and Japan 20 years later. Germany and Japan are natural allies because they are inspired by the same ideas of death-defying heroic philosophy on leader and loyalty, maintenance of racial purity, attention to ancestral heritage, and ceaseless work toward peace for the people and nation (262).

It is instructive to note here too that the Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel Heinrich Himmler, who was an admirer of Japan and the Japanese, wrote a forward to Heinz Corazza’s 1937 book Die Samurai: Ritter Des Reiches in Ehre und Treue. 17

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In Chapter 8 Law analyzes the influence that voluntary associations had in fostering and promoting German-Japanese relations. One important such association was the German-Japanese Association (Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft, DJG), even if, despite the efforts to promote good German-Japanese relations, "Nazi ideology inflicted much harm on German-Japanese interactions" (288). In this chapter, Law touches on the sensitive issue of discrimination against Japanese and persons of mixed German and Japanese blood by Germans. Law cites the Japan Times newspaper reporting "the dismissal of a German professor from a post which he had honorably held for many years merely because he happened to be of mixed German and Japanese blood" (278). The professor, in essence, was "guilty" (278) of being mixed-race rather than Japanese.

Law presents a very strong case that this mutual admiration between Germans and Japanese rested on a broad common ideological outlook in the sense that both had an intense hatred of Marxism, Communism, liberalism, international socialism, anarchism, and all other globalist ideologies and religions that inherently contained an anti-Volkish view of the world. The Nazi revolt against these globalist world views is clear in Alfred Rosenberg’s Myth of the Twentieth Century, which is without question one of the major texts of Nazi political thought

... this sign of our times is reflected in a turning away from absolute values, that is to say, in a retreat from values held to be beyond all organic experience, which the isolated ego once devised to create, by peaceful or violent means, a universal spiritual community. Once, such ultimate aim was the “Christianizing of the world” and its redemption through the Second Coming of Christ. Another goal was represented by the Humanist dream of ‘Mankind’... Humanity, the universal church, or the sovereign ego, divorced from the bonds of blood, are no longer absolute values for us.18

We find essentially the same broad worldview in Fundamentals of Our National Polity, a Japanese government’s Ministry of Education publication issued in 1937 that clarified the nature of the Japanese state. It argued that the various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan were due to the importation of European ideologies of the Enlightenment, all of which were based on individualism. The text further claimed that ideologies such as socialism, anarchism, and Communism were in the final analysis based on individualism. According to this document, however, hopeful trends in Europe were the “springing up of Fascist and Nazism.”19 Law’s study shows without a doubt that Germans and Japanese boasted of a common struggle against universal ideologies and religions.

However, I am not totally convinced that this relationship enabled Japanese and Germans to identify with each other in an imagined community. That is to say, I think that it may be an overstatement to suggest that this constituted a “binational community.” A sense of community means that there exists a feeling that members belong to a group, a feeling that the members of that community are special to one another, much like that among a biological family. Ultimately, with volkisch ideologies German Nazism and the Japanese equivalent, which I refer to as “radical Shintō ultranationalism,”20 a sense of community, a gemeinschaft relationship as the Germans would say, is theoretically difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize. However, it seems to me that Law creates an opening for at least a close relationship between Germans and Japanese by stating that “Hitler and his messages resonated with non-Germans on the one hand, and because German Nazis and their movement allowed for the limited accommodation of non-Aryan foreigners, in this case the Japanese, on the other” (2). The above example of the dismissal of the German professor from his post in Germany because he happened to be of mixed German and Japanese blood, however, gets to the very heart of the issue of the German/Japanese relationship.


When you get down to the personal level, Japanese could never really integrate into the Third Reich. Likewise, Germans could never be accepted as full-fledged Japanese in the Japanese Shintō state. Ethnic racism was at the core of both ideologies. This cordial relationship could only be maintained from a distance.

In regard to the issue of a Japanese “fascism,” Law needlessly enters the stale intellectual debate that has gone on among academics mostly in English speaking countries as to whether or not Japan was fascist. He states that “I posit that the essence of fascism is a domination of the ideological man over the civilian and military man” (12). He further argues that “They were Japanese fascists even if they did not necessarily make Japan fascist. Transnational Nazism argues that just as there were Japanese fascists, some Japanese became adherents of Hitler and Nazism, though of course Japan did not turn Nazi” (12).

Not only is this a hackneyed intellectual debate, it functions to prevent or obstruct any serious scholarly research effort to get an understanding of the core values of both German National Socialism and Shintō nationalism. I urge my academic colleagues to abandon this misappropriation of a European ideology to explain the ideology that inspired the Japanese elite to embark on global conquest in the 1930s and that mobilized the Japanese masses to fight to the death on the battlefields of Asia and the Pacific. It illustrates the disturbing and purely Euro-centered orientation by Western scholars in their analysis of non-Western cultures which makes them seem to be trapped in certain kinds of thought patterns from which they are unable to escape.

This meaningless debate about fascism in Germany and Japan tells one nothing about the ideology of Nazism or the prewar Japanese Shintō state. German National Socialism was a radical mass-based religion of ethnic nationalism that had at its core ethnic racial purity. Likewise, Japan’s prewar ideology, ‘radical Shintō ultranationalism,’ was a radical mass-based religion of ethnic nationalism that had at the center of its ideology the Shintō creation story of the Japanese islands by Izanami and Izanagi, the divine origins of the imperial line, the divinity of the emperor, the superiority of the Japanese Volksgemeinschaft, and the belief in a divine mission to establish global imperial rule under the emperor.

Law cites Japanese intellectual Kita Ikki as the representative of prewar Japanese rightest ideology. Kita’s corpus of writing in fact demonstrates that Kita was a leftist, not a rightist. In fact, Kita wrote on of the most massive and systematic critiques of the ideology of State Shintō in modern times in his 1906 book Kokutairon oyobi Junsei Shakaishugi (On the Kokutai and Pure Socialism). In this text, he severely criticized Japanese socialist writers who attempted to incorporate elements of kokutai thought into their socialist views, calling them “assassins of socialism.” He also launched a devastating attack on constitutional legal scholar Hozumi Yatsuka’s Shintō ultranationalist theory of the Japanese state and the ideology of the ruling elite. Kita was considered by many as one of the most dangerous thinkers since the founding of the Japanese state, and executed in 1937 by the rightist government.

Another reason I find it odd that Law included this issue of fascism in prewar Japan in the book is that most German scholars themselves do not go into such a discussion. To paraphrase German scholar Klaus Antoni, there was a kind of consensus in the German academic community that emerged from the so-called historian’s debate (Historikerstreit) in West Germany in the mid-1980s that the term “fascism” was inappropriate in dealing with the Nazi ideology in the prewar and


23 See Klaus Antoni’s writings on this subject. His major work is Shintō & die Konzeption des japanischen Nationalwesens (kokutai), (Lieden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1998). An English version of his book, Kokutai: Political Shintō from Early-Modern to Contemporary Japan, has been made available by Tübingen University Press in 2016. See section titled "Mythologie and Faschismus in Japan und Deutschland" [Mythology and Fascism in Japan and Germany].
wartime periods because those scholars thought that it would open the door for diluting the German guilt for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. They concluded that while Fascism, of course, was recognized as the correct name for the Italian ideology under Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, it could not be used to describe either German Nazism or Japanese radical Shintō ultranationalism.

In relation to this question of fascism in Germany as understood by Japanese thinkers, I found interesting Law’s quotation from the publisher of *An Overview of Germany, 1936*, which states in the preface that “Just as Fascism is certainly unique to Italy, so must Germany’s National Socialism be understood through the German special character and history” (128). This is a profound statement. But for some Japanese who did think about the Nazi ideology in a comparative context, the comment made by Fujisawa Chikao that “pure Nazism was really the manifestation of the Japanese spirit on German soil” was fascinating. Fujisawa’s statement implied that Japan’s ideology formed the ideological core of the Axis Powers, and that German National Socialism and Italian Fascism were subordinate variations of the Japanese ideology. As for fascism, the late Emilio Gentile, one of Italy’s foremost historians of fascism, notes in his book *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* that pioneering Italian Fascist Enrico Corradini was influenced and inspired by Japanese Shintō:

> Japan is the God of Japan. The strength this people draws from religion is a strength drawn from its own bowels; its heroes are great men from the past, nature, and the fatherland. It becomes auto-adoration.

Accordingly, should Western scholars be looking to Japan for the cultural origins of fascist thought?

Law’s book is nicely written, well organized, and makes excellent use of primary Japanese language sources. Overall, this is an impressive piece of research. It makes a substantial contribution to existing works on this topic and should recommended for use in graduate seminars on German-Japanese relations. One hopes that Law will extend his analysis of the ideology and culture in German-Japanese relations beyond 1936, perhaps in a future book on the ideology and culture of German-Japanese relations from 1936 to 1945. There is still a massive amount of literature on Japanese Shintō ultranationalist ideology from the late 1930s to 1945 that has never been looked at, let alone seriously studied, any Western scholar.

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It is a dream come true to have my book featured in an H-Diplo Roundtable. I thank Jon Davidann and Diane Labrosse for organizing the forum, and Eric Kurlander for writing the introduction. I am grateful to Daniel Hedinger, Stefan Ihrig, and Walter Skya for their thoughtful, serious engagement with my arguments. It is a privilege to have an opportunity to reflect on my work at this prestigious institution.

The impetus behind *Transnational Nazism* is to fill a gap in our understanding of modern German-Japanese relations. German cultural and technological influences on Japanese modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance in Western medicine, higher education, the army, and the Meiji Constitution, are well known. Tokyo and Berlin’s diplomatic and military alliances between 1936 and 1945 are the subject of several studies. But what happened in the years immediately preceding their strategic alignment? The first decade and a half of the interwar era have received relatively scant attention, especially in English-language scholarship. The two countries did not pursue a vigorous foreign policy toward each other and did not leave behind voluminous official records. So I searched for evidence of the ‘missing link’ that bridged cultural traffic and political affinity not in government archives but among artefacts generated by German and Japanese civil societies, in particular mass media sources. I argue that the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology in the early 1930s fundamentally transformed Japanese-German relations by triggering a phenomenon that I label “transnational Nazism.” Some Japanese became avid supporters of Hitler and Nazism. They wrote and spoke in ways that would cause us no qualms about calling them Nazis, had they been Germans. In fact, they were more likely to be true believers because their enthusiasm for Nazism was not motivated by careerist pressure. In Germany, some Nazis interpreted Nazi ideology selectively in order to accommodate Japan in their worldview. These Japanese and Germans esteemed each other, shared admiration of Hitler and Nazism, communicated in Nazified German, adopted Nazi symbols and imagery, and advocated bilateral rapprochement.

All three reviewers note that the narrative in *Transnational Nazism* ends in 1936 and mention their interest in seeing it continued. I agree that there is value in extending the reciprocal cultural-historical approach to 1945. But 1936 marks a turning point in German-Japanese relations and is thus a suitable place to conclude a phase of the history. Japan and Germany publicly formalized their accord through the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936. The agreement turned what had been propagated freely by individual opinion makers into state policy. Until then, there had been few tangible incentives and limited concert for strengthening bilateral ties. After the pact, German-Japanese cultural interactions became more politicized and the subject of purposeful propaganda, which was implemented through public or cultural diplomacy. The premiere of the film *The Samurai’s Daughter* in 1937, a Hitler Youth tour in Japan in 1938, and an exhibition of classical Japanese art in Berlin in 1939 were all orchestrated and trumpeted by the regimes as embodiments of Japanese-German cultural and political solidarity.

A cultural history of German-Japanese relations from 1936 to 1945 should be written differently from one on the years before the Anti-Comintern Pact. It should be situated among the existing diplomatic and military histories of the period. It must take into account the more intentional state propaganda, the bandwagon effect, foreign policy, and war. Some chapters in *Transnational Nazism* discuss developments after 1936. In Germany, the once-lowly German-Japanese Association exploited Berlin’s alliance with Tokyo to expand its portfolio of activities and to claim more bureaucratic power. Several individuals with no discernable previous interest in Japan suddenly expressed vociferous support for the country. In Japan, the bandwagon effect was even more pronounced. A lucrative market for publications on Hitler, Nazism, and Germany...

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attracted many new producers from the mid-1930s and indicates high consumer demand. After Japan attacked the United States, knowledge from Germany was even more highly valued as a potential tool for saving Japan from destruction.

The reviewers also critique the thesis in Transnational Nazism from the perspective of the history of fascism, though their positions are sharply different. Hedinger and Skya both identify problems with affixing the label fascism to Japan. Hedinger suggests that “a new global history of fascism” can yet shed light on “Japan’s [highly selective] adoption of Western fascism” and that “the emphasis [on] one’s own particularities made Japanese fascists [in] to real fascists in the first place.” He adds that excluding “Japan a priori from the history of fascism [because it does not resemble other fascist regimes] is in line with the older, predominantly Western reading of interwar Japan.” Skya rejects the applicability of fascism to Japan altogether. “I urge my academic colleagues to abandon this misappropriation of a European ideology to explain the ideology that inspired the Japanese elite to embark on global conquest in the 1930s and that mobilized the Japanese masses to fight to the death on the battlefields of Asia and the Pacific. It illustrates the disturbing and purely Euro-centered orientation by Western scholars in their analysis of non-Western cultures which makes them seem to be trapped in certain kinds of thought patterns from which they are unable to escape.”

Thus, both describing and not describing pre-1945 Japan as fascist can open one to criticisms of seeing Japan through a Western lens rather than understanding it on its own terms. What to do with fascism is a dilemma that every researcher of interwar and wartime Japanese rightist ideologies has to confront. The question also touches on larger ones on the uniqueness, comparability, and agency of Japan. I tend to agree with Skya that debates over Japanese fascism have long run their course, with little resolution. Calling Japan or any country fascist is an act of reaching a conclusion, one that must be based on evidence. To claim that a country’s emphasis on its particular deviations from Western fascism only makes it more fascist runs the risks of circular reasoning and taking both sides of an argument. It also defeats the purpose of grouping countries under a common category. In any case, the fascist label, whether applied or rejected, does little to illuminate individual aspects of a society.

Transnational Nazism is not a book on fascism – generic, Italian, or Japanese. Specifically, it examines the impact of one ideology, Nazism (that is, National Socialism, not generic national socialism), on interwar Japanese-German relations. I expected keen reader interest in locating the book’s thesis in the context of fascism, so I briefly elaborated on what the existence of Japanese adherents of Hitler and Nazism may mean for the presence of fascism in Japan. This focus on Nazism does not “eclipse” Italian fascism.28 Certainly, fascism had broad appeal to many in Germany and in Japan. But the literature on fascism in Japan and in Germany is already extensive. If anything, it is this long-standing attention to fascism that has distracted us from properly documenting and assessing Japanese receptions of Nazism.

Most important, the evidence I examined argues against any notion that German and Japanese opinion makers were in a habit of invoking Fascism or Italy when they promoted Japanese-German rapprochement before the Anti-Comintern Pact. German commentators usually articulated ties with Japan in terms of East-West interactions. They imagined Germany and Japan each to be the resurgent nation of its realm. They flexibly interpreted Nazi ideology and Japanese civilization to fit Japan in their worldview. They saw no need or reason to insert Fascist Italy. Some Japanese cheered the ascendancy of Hitler and Nazism and wanted Japan to form a stronger bond with his Germany. But most of them did not push for similar political developments in Japan. Nor were they passive recipients or conduits of ideas from Germany. Instead, they had agency in distilling Nazism and emphasizing the aspects that they favored to their audiences. They took care to linguistically distinguish Nazism from Fascism. Leftwing critics, rather than rightwing boosters, were more likely to conflate the two to denounce Nazism as “German fascism” (78). Another clue to the allure specific to Nazism is the timing of the rightward ideological conversion of some Japanese leftists and liberals. From the Nazi electoral breakthroughs in the early 1930s and markedly after Hitler’s rise to power, more and more observers and even critics of Nazism changed their stance to become adherents. They had had over a decade to be won over by Mussolini’s Italy when it was the sole fascist state in Europe, but it

did not interest or impress them enough to abandon their leftist or liberal views. It took the Hitler regime about a year to turn them into fawning admirers. Of course, many of them came to praise both Germany and Italy, particularly as the three states took independent steps to challenge the Versailles–Washington system. While I agree with Hedinger that Fascism “developed its greatest global appeal” during the period examined in my book, it does not preclude the possibility that Nazism developed its transnational appeal in Japan, distinct from Fascism. Building on the widespread Japanese respect for German civilization, Nazism attracted attention in ways that Italian Fascism did not. The Japanese were able to compartmentalize their responses to the two ideologies. We should be sensitive to that nuance rather than presuppose that the Japanese saw themselves in a global fascist moment.

Since the publication of Transnational Nazism, I have encountered casual and serious comments on the role of Italy in interwar Japanese-German relations. For instance, Hedinger points out that the book’s focus on Nazism “categorically excludes the third power in the league – Italy.” It is an understandable question. We now know to think of Italy because Japan, Germany, and Italy forged alliances in the late 1930s and fought on the same side in World War II. Allied and Axis propaganda often portrayed the three countries as a group. But to ask about Italy in German-Japanese relations between 1919 and 1936 is to assume that Japanese and Germans should have anticipated that there would be a third country, that it would be Italy, and that the three powers would come together. Hindsight makes the historian’s task possible, but it can introduce a powerful bias to the ways we interpret the past. For most of the period covered by Transnational Nazism, Germans and Japanese did not think of their nations as being in a “league,” much less one including Italy. Germany was a liberal democracy. Italy was a fascist dictatorship. Japan was a new great power diligently taking part in multilateral instruments. Even after the end of Taisho Democracy and Hitler’s rise to power, Germany’s relations with Japan and with Italy deteriorated in the first months of the Hitler regime. It was by no means a foregone conclusion that the three countries’ comparable political trajectories would result in any tripartite strategic alignment. I demonstrate in Transnational Nazism that the idea of Japanese-German rapprochement was accepted as a tangible, plausible prospect only after technological and ideological breakthroughs in the early 1930s. Throughout the book, I highlight the substantial costs in money, time, and effort that Germans and Japanese needed to overcome the distance between them. While historians are accustomed to traversing space and time, for historical actors these obstacles were real and should be properly accounted for. The threshold for a history of bilateral relations can already be high. To add a third country demands an even higher level of evidence. This is not to deny that some Germans and Japanese promoted closer ties with Italy. But they mostly did so on a bilateral basis rather than a trilateral scheme. The justifications and dynamics of German-Japanese and German-Italian rapprochements are different. The establishment of the eventual Italian-German-Japanese alliance reflects the separate bilateral approaches. In late 1936, Germany and Italy announced the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and then Germany and Japan concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact. Nazi Germany was the common denominator and the central node of the Axis.

It has become more crucial to understand the enduring appeal of Nazism to audiences beyond its natural constituents. I am gratified that Transnational Nazism has provoked such insightful comments. I hope to see more publications on the topic and look forward to continuing the discourse.