

## “A Living Past as the Nation’s Personality”: *Jinnō shōtōki*, Early Shōwa Nationalism, and *Das Dritte Reich*

Michael WACHUTKA<sup>1</sup>

In the 1930s, contemporary relevance was attributed to Kitabatake Chikafusa’s *Jinnō shōtōki* (1339) as a “standard work of national education” and an expression of “folk-national weltanschauung” for encapsulating the concept of *kokutai*, Japan’s national essence. It was praised too for claiming that Japan is a *shinkoku* or “divine country” wherein the sun goddess bequeaths her line of rule to all eternity; a concept of perpetual divine presence that has been described as the epitome of Shinto itself. In order to make the “Shinto” concepts of *kokutai* and *shinkoku* accessible to the uninitiated reader in Germany, Hermann Bohner, the first translator of *Jinnō shōtōki* into a Western language, in 1935 deployed Arthur Moeller van den Bruck’s *Das dritte Reich* (1923) as comparison. An examination of Moeller van den Bruck’s ideas, the socio-political milieu in Germany at the time, and Bohner’s political and theological stance reveals *Jinnō shōtōki*’s contemporary significance as being imbued with an almost metaphysical essentialism of the nation’s character. This article traces a shift in *Jinnō shōtōki*’s evaluation from the early Meiji period, examines the role Shinto actually plays in Kitabatake’s work, and elucidates, via Bohner’s comparative approach, its importance for early Shōwa period nationalism.

**Keywords:** *Jinnō shōtōki*, Shinto, *kokutai*, *shinkoku*, nationalism, religion, Kitabatake Chikafusa, Hermann Bohner, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Yamada Yoshio

### Introduction

The *Jinnō shōtōki* 神皇正統記, written in 1339 by Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354), was first introduced to a broader Western audience by the British consular official and Japanologist, William George Aston, in his pioneering book *A History of Japanese Literature*, first published in 1898. Aston did not present it in a particularly favorable light. In his eyes, the *Jinnō shōtōki* was a typical product of the Nanbokuchō 南北朝 period (1332–1392)—

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which was characterized by a schism between the Southern and Northern Courts—that Aston regarded, together with the following Muromachi period, as a “dark age [being] singularly barren of important literature in Japan.” Almost nothing of what was written at that time “deserve[s] more than a passing notice.” He describes the first of the six volumes of *Jinnō shōtōki* as “purely mythical. [... Its] account of the creation of Japan [... is] taken partly from *Nihongi*, but mixed with Chinese philosophy and Indian mythical cosmography in the strangest manner.” The subsequent volumes are nothing more than a “brief and meagre [résumé] of the history of Japan.”<sup>2</sup> Aston admits that “if there is also much that we are inclined to set down as mere platitudes, it is fair to remember that Kitabatake was the first Japanese writer who attempted to apply philosophical principles to actual politics, and that what seems trite to us may have appeared novel and striking to contemporary readers.” Nevertheless, he was also quick to note that “modern critics bestow on him a lavish praise which to us seems hardly deserved.”<sup>3</sup>

Aston’s opinions about the *Jinnō shōtōki* were put into perspective by the German scholar Karl Florenz, another early European Japanologist, in his anthology *Geschichte der japanischen Litteratur* of 1906. Florenz generally has more positive things to say about the *Jinnō shōtōki*, especially those passages in which “the author discusses the nature of specifically Japanese phenomena.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, he wholeheartedly agrees with Aston’s negative opinion about volume six, in which Kitabatake deals with his own time but fails to give a detailed first-hand account of contemporary events. Moreover, Florenz quotes Aston to the effect that

[This volume] is very disappointing. [...] Chikafusa has not thought it proper to give more than a short and barren account of the events in which he was a principal actor. Most of this volume is taken up with dissertations on the principles of government, which, however necessary for a comprehension of the motives and ideas of Japanese statesmen under the old regime, are not very interesting to the European reader.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps due to these disparaging words, it was more than thirty years before the first translation of the entire *Jinnō shōtōki* was completed. It was undertaken by the German Japanologist Hermann Böhner (1884–1963), and published in German in 1935 by the Japanese–German Cultural Institute (Nichi-Doku Bunka Kyōkai 日獨文化協會) in Tokyo. This translation was followed in 1939 by a second volume containing Böhner’s extensive and meticulous commentary and annotations.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Aston’s prognosis, Böhner’s translation received a great deal of interest and both his volumes were highly praised in scholarly as well as popular reviews. Obviously, the contents of Kitabatake’s work had not changed. What *had* changed,

2 Aston 1907, pp. 164–65.

3 Aston 1907, p. 166.

4 Florenz 1906, p. 343. All translations from non-English sources are my own.

5 Florenz 1906, p. 343; originally in Aston 1907, p. 166.

6 Böhner’s translation of *Jinnō shōtōki* and the ensuing work of commentary established and consolidated his emerging reputation as one of the most knowledgeable observers of Japan and prolific translators of Japanese sources. Two other major works around that time that earned him respect were his 1934 annotated translation of the ninth century collection of Buddhist tales *Nipponkoku genbō zen’aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善悪靈異記 as *Legenden aus der Frühzeit des japanischen Buddhismus* and the 1940 *Shōtoku Taishi*, a thousand page magnum opus of translations of all available sources on that ancient Japanese prince. Various installments of this latter work appeared after 1936.

by the time the translation was available for the scrutiny of Western readers, was the basis for its assessment in the prevailing circumstances in both Europe and Japan.

In his extensive, 188 page introduction to the *Jinnō shōtōki*, Bohner counters Aston’s harsh critique by pointing out Aston’s lack of sensitivity to the real subject matter.<sup>7</sup> Rather than merely focusing on the many dates, names, and facts, which can easily appear strange, dry, and dead for the uninitiated occidental observer,

...we would do well initially to leave the strange exterior we cannot grasp unanswered—as we readily did for the longest time with regard to the ancient world [of Greece and Rome]—and try to see whether there is something else that might appeal to us, and whether there might be something lying behind the names, facts, and dates that is somehow related to us. Although there may be some aspects of this book that we would not have understood in other times, today these aspects may, however, be nearer to us. The immediate present seems to have an air of the *Jinnō shōtōki*.<sup>8</sup>

Bohner’s introduction gives three reasons why the *Jinnō shōtōki* might indeed arouse interest: first, as a great work of literature praised by many Japanese for both its style and content; secondly, as a book that profoundly influenced later texts such as the Mito school’s extensive tome on Japanese history, the *Dai Nihon shi* 大日本史, and thus, as a vital stimulus for the decisive currents at work in the establishment of modern Meiji from 1868; and lastly, as one of the fundamental texts of higher education “that nearly no Japanese who reached a leading position [in society] was able to bypass during the crucial years of his development, and therefore this work merits special attention in terms of modern contemporary pedagogy.”<sup>9</sup> Five years earlier, Bohner had already expounded this three-fold significance of Kitabatake’s book in similar terms in a lecture delivered on 9 April 1930 at the Tokyo-based German East Asiatic Society, OAG.<sup>10</sup>

The third notion resonates clearly in a review of Bohner’s translation published in the inaugural edition of *Monumenta Nipponica*. It calls the *Jinnō shōtōki* “a Bible-book of Japan’s folk-national weltanschauung and a standard work of national education.”<sup>11</sup> A later reviewer repeats these remarks and attests that they accurately “express this work’s significance for the *present*. When today, a German Japanologist strives to make the Japanese nation (*Volk*) as a whole understandable to the German people, he first of all has to start with the [notion of what is] significant for the present times within the Japanese nation.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand the import of Kitabatake Chikafusa’s *Jinnō shōtōki* for that period, I examine the contemporary meaning of the expressions “folk-national weltanschauung” and “standard work of national education.” Furthermore, I investigate the crucial question of what made this book, which six hundred years earlier argued for the legitimate rule of the Southern Court during an imperial schism, so important for the modern Japanese nation in the early twentieth century.

7 Bohner 1935, p. 2.

8 Bohner 1935, pp. 2–3.

9 Bohner 1935, p. 1.

10 Bohner 1930, p. 8.

11 “...ein Bibelbuch der völkisch-nationalen Weltanschauung Japans und national-pädagogisches Standardwerk” (Kraus 1938, p. 285).

12 Zachert 1940, p. 311 (emphasis in the original).

I begin with an overview of *Jinnō shōtōki*'s reception from the early Meiji period until the 1930s. This will reveal the shift in the evaluation of this work, and the reason for attributing “contemporary relevance” to it. Next, I explain how one source of such relevance, the concept of *kokutai*, Japan's national essence or polity, is expressed in the *Jinnō shōtōki*. For many contemporary Japanese commentators, the national essence was encapsulated in the work's opening passage that describes Japan as a *shinkoku* or “divine country,” wherein the sun goddess bequeaths her line of rule to all eternity. This perpetual divine presence was seen by many as the epitome of Shinto itself. This demands in turn an examination of the role Shinto actually plays in Kitabatake's work.

In order to make accessible to uninitiated readers back in Germany the “Shinto” concepts of *kokutai* and *shinkoku*—imbued as they are with an almost metaphysical essentialism—Hermann Bohner compares the *Jinnō shōtōki* to Arthur Moeller van den Bruck's work *Das dritte Reich* (1923). This seems to demand an exploration of both the personal background of Moeller van den Bruck and the socio-political situation in Germany at the time. Such an exploration will also shed light on Bohner's possible reasoning for choosing *Das dritte Reich* as a foil of comparison. I finally delve into Hermann Bohner's own personal and intellectual background to understand better his reasons for referring to *Das dritte Reich*. The conclusion returns to the paper's title, “A Living Past as the Nation's Personality,” in order to clarify further the significance of the *Jinnō shōtōki* in early Shōwa period nationalism.

### The *Jinnō shōtōki* since the Early Meiji Period

The new Meiji government from the outset sought knowledge far and wide (in accordance with the Imperial Oath of 6 April 1868), but it also emphasized the importance of new forms of national education. Leading *kokugaku* (national learning) scholars such as Yano Harumichi 矢野玄道 (1823–1887) and Hirata Kanetane 平田鉄胤 (1799–1880) were commissioned to investigate the educational system. They quickly submitted their proposals, and on 31 October 1868 the government announced the establishment of an Institute for Imperial Studies, the Kōgakujo 皇学所 in Kyoto. The Institute's regulations categorized the texts to be used for its curriculum under the headings “sacred scriptures” (*shinten* 神典) and “history works” (*rekishisho* 歴史書), and divided them into three grades of difficulty, lower, middle, and upper. The *Jinnō shōtōki* was the first book on the list of history works to be taught in the lower grades.<sup>13</sup>

Meiji period *kokugaku* societies, such as the Great Eight Island Academic Society (Ōyashima Gakkai 大八洲學會) founded in 1886 focused on editing historical accounts. Kitabatake's work was one of the first such editions they published. Some of the Society's leading scholars delivered private lectures on the *Jinnō shōtōki* for Emperor Meiji, and in its attempt at edifying the broader populace, the Society's private school, Ōyashima Gakkō, established in late 1891 with students from all over the country, used this book in its first semester classes. Already on 10 June 1883, at the opening ceremony of the Shigaku Kyōkai 史學協會, the predecessor of the Ōyashima Gakkai, Maruyama Sakura 丸山作樂 (1840–1899) had expounded

13 For a more in-depth history of this Institute for Imperial Studies, with detailed background information and sources, see Wachutka 2012, chap. 3.1.

the necessary form and style for a true national history in the new era. He described why the *Jinnō shōtōki* was best suited as a model for a modern, national historiography:

The literary style [...] should be taken from Lord Kitabatake’s *Jinnō shōtōki*. The reason is that although the *San kagami* [i.e. the narrative-style ‘three mirrors’ of history *Ōkagami* 大鏡, *Mizu kagami* 水鏡, and *Masu kagami* 増鏡] as well as other medieval historical works to some extent embrace [a literary] style, there is nothing that exceeds the *Jinnō shōtōki* with regard to its spirit. This *Shōtōki* records an abundance of marvelous matters. Although it extends to absurd Buddhist matters [...], the Lord took a stand, and with a brilliant and powerful brush clearly defined the highest principles of one’s moral obligations [i.e. the true relationship between sovereign and subject]. Although it expands its scope by including both China and India, it made our country paramount, and truly achieved the style of a national history.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the *Jinnō shōtōki* is also evident in Bohner’s first encounter with the work. In November 1914, shortly after the outbreak of World War I, Bohner was brought to Japan as a prisoner of war from the small German concession of Tsingtao (Qingdao) in northeastern China, where since 24 April of that year he had taught at the missionary school and studied under the famous missionary-cum-sinologist, Richard Wilhelm. Being already well versed in Chinese history and classical literature, and fascinated by China’s cultural grandness, Bohner started to learn Japanese during his six year imprisonment in the Matsuyama and Bandō camps. Although reluctant at first, he slowly developed an interest in Japan, and after his release in 1920 he embarked on a mission to study the culture of Japan, his new home where he lived for almost fifty years. When posing the fundamental question of “what Japan actually is,” he was invariably referred to the *Jinnō shōtōki*.<sup>15</sup> Among the many existing textual editions, the one most frequently recommended to him was that compiled by Keigetsu 桂月, i.e. Ōmachi Yoshie 大町芳衛 (1869–1925) in summer 1924. Keigetsu was a jingoistic poet, critic, and member of the afore-mentioned Ōyashima Gakkai. This “extremely widely used” edition was intended for high school students, and thus provided a window “into the heart of contemporary Japanese education.”<sup>16</sup>

In his edition, Keigetsu guides the reader with short explanations about individual passages of the *Jinnō shōtōki*, and Bohner quotes Keigetsu at the beginning of his own volume of annotations. In his introduction, Keigetsu states the reason for its “contemporary relevance.” The case is unambiguous:

The *Jinnō shōtōki* expounds Japan’s unique national essence (*kokutai*) of having a single [unbroken] *tennō* line through ten thousand generations. With this work, history truly begins in Japan for the first time. All Japanese people should have read this book and thus know about our country’s national essence (*kokutai*), which is incomparable throughout the world.<sup>17</sup>

14 The complete speech can be found in Wachutka 2012, chap. 6.3.

15 Bohner 1935, p. 2.

16 Bohner 1939, p. 9.

17 Quoted in Bohner 1939, pp. 12–13.

### *Jinnō shōtōki* and the Concept of Japan's National Essence (*Kokutai*)

Keigetsu's remarks clearly reveal a shift in the assessment of the *Jinnō shōtōki*, if we compare it with statements by Japanese authors from the early and middle Meiji period. In Meiji, *kokugaku* circles rather focused on the philological aspects of *kokugaku*'s Edo period legacy; only later were its politico-theological aspects emphasized. Stripped of most of its religious Shinto affiliations, Meiji *kokugaku* primarily dealt with ancient history, Japanese literature, language, and traditions.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, nationalist zealots in the years before and during World War II used the concept of *kokugaku* as an ideological framework for strengthening the imperial state, resonating with Hirata Atsutane's radical writings on the Japanese spirit and Japanese superiority. The *kokugaku* scholar and linguist Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 (1873–1958), for instance, strongly rejected the assumption that *kokugaku* was solely concerned with philological learning. Instead, in his 1939 work *Kokugaku no hongī* 國學の本義, he insisted that the principal objective of *kokugaku* was to clarify Japan's national polity or essence (*kokutai*). Interestingly enough, Hermann Böhner extensively used Yamada's edition of the *Jinnō shōtōki* for his translation. Although there were several manuscripts and other textual editions at his disposal, the only real help available in interpreting Kitabatake's text was, he stated, Yamada's monumental exegesis *Jinnō shōtōki jutsugi* 神皇正統記述義 of 1932.<sup>19</sup>

Yamada Yoshio taught for many years at Tōhoku Imperial University in Sendai. In 1940, he assumed the position of founding president of the renamed Kōgakkan University in Ise. In 1941, he became a counselor at the Jingiin 神祇院, and in 1945 the director of the Kokushi Henshūin 国史編修院 (Institute for the Compilation of National History).<sup>20</sup> In particular, he concentrated his research efforts on the *Man'yōshū* and the *Kojiki*, as well as on Hirata Atsutane. Today, Yamada Yoshio is primarily known as an influential grammarian. However, he was also an autodidactic scholar of Japanese philology and literature, and had a profound knowledge of Shinto. Yamada's extensive textual-critical edition of the *Jinnō shōtōki* influenced most later Japanese editors of the work, and was subsequently referred to as a "masterpiece."<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Yamada Yoshio was the author of *Kokutai no hongī* 國體の本義, an explanation of the Japanese national essence written in 1933. Three years later, in 1936, it was reprinted in a popular edition or *fukyūban* 普及版, and thus reached a wide readership. It antedates the Ministry of Education's infamous *Kokutai no hongī*, published a year later in 1937 under the same title. Yamada was also a member of the latter book's compilation committee. Hence, we can safely assume that Yamada Yoshio was one of the main theoreticians of *kokutai* ideology in the 1930s and 40s. We thus find in his person a direct link between the positive assessment of the *Jinnō shōtōki* during this period, and the intellectual framework that fostered this assessment. Despite the fact that Yamada Yoshio was expelled from public service after Japan's defeat in World War II on account of his ultra nationalism, he was nevertheless awarded the *Bunka kunshō* 文化勲章 (Order of Cultural Merit) in 1958 for his achievements.

18 For a detailed account of these and other aspects of Meiji period national learning (*kokugaku*), see Wachutka 2012.

19 Böhner 1935, pp. 183–84. Böhner consistently misreads Yamada Yoshio's personal name as Takao.

20 As an external bureau of the Naimushō 内務省, the Jingiin was an administrative organ that in 1940 replaced the obsolete Jinjakyoku 神社局 or Bureau of Shrines. The Jinjakyoku, in turn, had been established in 1900 together with the Shūkyōkyoku 宗教局 or Bureau of Religious Affairs. Their predecessor, the Shajikyoku 社寺局 or Bureau of Shrines and Temples, was split in two under Imperial Order no. 163. Throughout World War II, this Jingiin handled matters of shrines, the priesthood, and the dissemination of religious belief. It was abolished in 1946 under the forced separation of state and religion.

21 Iwasa 1965, p. 31 and 2003, p. 289.

*Jinnō shōtōki* and Shinto

Closely linked to the twentieth century discourse on national essence is the concept of Japan as a *shinkoku* or *kami no kuni* 神国, a “divine country of the gods,” which in turn is based on the belief in the perpetual work of the Japanese deities. Hence, the famous opening passage of the *Jinnō shōtōki* is cited as the key text in the Ministry of Education’s *Kokutai no hongī*. It appears in the first chapter entitled “Kokushi o ikkan suru seishin 國史を一貫する精神 (The True Meaning of Our National Entity)” of Book Two, “Kokushi ni okeru kokutai no kengen 國史に於ける國體の顯現 (The Manifestation of Our National Entity in History).”<sup>22</sup> The opening passage of the *Jinnō shōtōki* reads:

Great Japan is a divine land. The heavenly progenitor laid its foundation at the outset, and for all eternity the sun goddess bequeaths her line of rule [therein]. Only in our country is this true. Nothing like that exists in other countries. This is why it is called the divine land.<sup>23</sup>

Many Japanese commentators not only saw these sentences as encapsulating Japan’s national essence, but also interpreted their suggestion of a perpetual divine presence as the epitome of Shinto itself. When pondering the book’s first line as a summary of the entire work, Bohner explains:

Japan is *shinkoku* 神國, realm of the gods [...] this is Japan’s *kokutai* 國體 [...] this identifies the theme carried throughout the book. The observation begins with the creation of the world, continuously traces this theme further, step by step through the eras [...] “always anew, always afresh,” “*aratami*,” it reveals itself, up into the immediate present. [...] To the foreign observer, it must be pointed out here that a close relation in character [of the notion of a divine land] exists to Shintō. Whatever Shintō is and however complex its outer appearances are, one does not err, particularly not in the eyes of the Japanese observer, if one says: Chikafusa here aims well at what Shintō [...] is; he expresses it; he says what Shintō originally was and still wants to be today. And to many Japanese observers, it is also very important that the foreign onlooker knows about this relation in character, notices and acknowledges it.<sup>24</sup>

A valuable hint as to Bohner’s own views on the role of Shinto in this context can be found in his first essay on Japan, published in 1927, which deals with the *Jinnō shōtōki*. Indeed, the title already contains a clear indication of what in Bohner’s eyes is the true intent and core of Kitabatake’s work, namely, a “Shintō theodicy.”<sup>25</sup> More precisely, Bohner regards the work as an attempt to give hope in the dark hours of warfare and decay, to affirm a divine justice and providence amidst the chaos and moral evil that surrounded its author. Bohner’s assessment of the close relation in character between the *Jinnō shōtōki* and Shinto was later echoed in the West. For instance, the influential post-war anthology, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, likewise acknowledges *Jinnō shōtōki* as “the most important document of medieval Shintō,” without giving any reasons or further explanations for this claim.<sup>26</sup>

22 The translation follows Hall, Gauntlett 1949, pp. 105–106.

23 Yamada 1932, p. 1; Iwasa 2003, p. 15; cf. Bohner 1935, p. 191 and Varley 1980, p. 49.

24 Bohner 1935, p. 4.

25 Cf. Bohner 1927.

26 Tsunoda et al. 1964, p. 267. This is still true of the revised and expanded second edition, published in 2001 as *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume One: From Earliest Times to 1600*. Here, however, this sentence has been slightly amended. The *Jinnō shōtōki* is now “one of the most important documents of the Shinto revival of the medieval age” (p. 358).

A more contemporary Japanese commentator, Shirayama Yoshitarō 白山芳太郎, argues that Kitabatake Chikafusa's views on Shinto are rooted in the mythological foundation of the imperial reign and the promise made by the deities that it will be preserved eternally.<sup>27</sup> Based on the notion that heaven and earth are everlasting and that Japan is a country of the kami, Shirayama sees Kitabatake developing an unprecedented case for a national consciousness. Kitabatake's thoughts on Shinto can furthermore be seen in his discourse on the rightful way of succession, which in turn is based on a discussion of the nature and importance of the three imperial regalia, the mirror, sword, and jewels.<sup>28</sup> Such diverse and vague allusions lead to the question of the role Shinto plays in Kitabatake's work. Given that the term "Shinto" itself is only found three times in the entire text, we need to take a closer look at the context in which the word "Shinto" is actually used.

Kitabatake expounds on why the life span of Japan's divine rulers suddenly became significantly shorter at the point of transition between the later earthly deities and the legendary first human sovereign Jinmu 神武, and in so doing rejects the Indian-Buddhist idea of historical decline. Instead, he ascribes this change to a curse by the mythological figure Iwanaga hime 磐長姫. In an episode narrated in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the heavenly grandson Ninigi no mikoto 瓊々杵尊, Jinmu Tennō's great grandfather, was once offered the hand in marriage of either the beautiful Konohana Sakuya hime 木花開耶姫, whose name means Princess Flowering-tree-blossom, or her older sister Iwanaga hime, Princess Rock-long. He chose Konohana Sakuya hime, and so her unattractive sister, offended by the rejection, pronounced a curse to the effect that the life of the emperors would no longer be as eternal as the rocks, but henceforth as brief as the blossoms of a flowering tree. Alluding to this mythological passage to explain the change in life span, Kitabatake writes that "the way [the workings] of the gods (*shintō*) is difficult to infer."<sup>29</sup> The next occurrence of the characters 神道 (*shintō* or *kami no michi*) is in his account of the fifteenth sovereign, Ōjin Tennō 応神天皇. After stating that rectitude is the primary intent (*kokoro*) of the two deities Amaterasu and Hachiman, Kitabatake continues by saying that "if one departs from the way of the gods (*shintō*), especially in this country, which is a country of the gods (*kami no kuni*), one cannot even for a day receive [the blessings of] the sun and moon."<sup>30</sup>

These two passages are rather general in nature, but the only other occurrence of the term Shinto—actually the first to appear in Kitabatake's work—merits a longer citation in its context. It is a key passage for the whole book. Kitabatake delivers a long narrative describing the creation of the world and of Japan from the Indian-Buddhist and Chinese-Confucian points of view, and then turns his attention to Japan proper. He writes:

Only in our country has the receipt of the imperial throne (*bitsugi* 日嗣) been without iniquity from the primordial separation of heaven and earth until the present day of our generation. Although at times [the throne] was passed on collaterally, it remained [always] within the same family, as [the succession] inevitably found its way back to the rightful [direct] line. This is due to the shining deity's (*shinmei* 神明 [=Amaterasu]) forever new august pledge, and this is what differs from all other countries. Although it is said that

27 Shirayama 1984.

28 Shirayama 1984, p. 270.

29 Yamada 1932, p. 96; Iwasa 1965, p. 66; cf. Varley 1980, p. 84. Although otherwise very meticulous and precise, Bohner (1935, p. 217), for unknown reasons, omits this sentence in his translation.

30 Yamada 1932, p. 165; Iwasa 1965, p. 82; cf. Bohner 1935, p. 233 and Varley 1980, p. 108.

the workings of the gods (*shintō*) are not easily revealed, it would create confusion if the origin [this fundamental point] is not known. It is to prevent such evil that I have committed some [thoughts] to writing. Intending to expound how, since the age of gods, [the imperial reign] was righteously received and transmitted, I have omitted matters that usually can be heard [are common knowledge] and accordingly have named [this text] Chronicle of the Divine Sovereigns’ Direct Line [of Reign].<sup>31</sup>

The first book of the *Jinnō shōtōki* ends with this passage. The second then begins with an account of the Japanese “Age of the Gods.” According to Yamada Yoshio’s exhaustive exegesis *Jinnō shōtōki jutsugi* in 1932, this passage reveals the true aim and main objective of the entire book. Yamada claims that from the outset, the *Jinnō shōtōki* naturally divides into two grand themes. The first theme is already found in the book’s famous opening sentences cited above. The second is “our national essence (*kokutai*),” which for Yamada is the fundamental principle running throughout the work.<sup>32</sup> Following this argumentation, the real significance of the *Jinnō shōtōki* is thus neither its account of the imperial line’s legitimacy nor its views on appropriate conduct for Japanese sovereigns. Rather, its significance, particularly for Japan of the early twentieth century, is in its underlying politico-religious ideology that supported an emperor-centered national identity.

The concept of *shinkoku* was of course nothing new, even in Kitabatake’s day. The term can already be found in the *Nihon shoki* of 720, where the King of Silla, aware that the invincible army of Jingū kōgō 神功皇后 was approaching, acknowledges the superiority of Japan: “I have heard that in the East there is a divine country (*shinkoku*) named Nippon [...]. This divine force must belong to that country. How could we resist them by force of arms?”<sup>33</sup>

The term *shinkoku* can also be found in the last of the six ancient official court chronicles, the *Sandai jitsuroku* 三代実録 (901), where it is used in the imperial edicts of Jōgan 貞観 11/12 (January 870) sent to Ise and the Iwashimizu Hachiman 石清水八幡 shrine seeking divine assistance against outside attack.<sup>34</sup> However, the *Jinnō shōtōki* evinces a clear shift in the implications of the term. Japan is no longer a “divine country” simply because it is protected by the deities and shielded against malevolent adversaries from outside. Instead, it now has obtained an internal divine quality. Only Japan is reigned over by divine sovereigns of an unbroken dynasty perpetuated in a direct line that originates in the sun deity Amaterasu herself, and is “as eternal as heaven and earth” (*tenjō mukyū* 天壤無窮). In this complex theological view of a transcendental history, it is the innate divine origin that defines the sacredness of the imperial throne, a miraculous quality that also extends to all people in the realm. Indeed, at one point, Kitabatake writes that “the ten thousand people [= everyone] under heaven are all divine beings.”<sup>35</sup> In general, Kitabatake’s text led to the understanding of Japan as a sacred realm, since the land, the sovereign, and the people were generated by, or descended from, the kami. Kitabatake Chikafusa’s development of such an explicitly national consciousness based on Japan’s divinity—while including Chinese Confucian

31 Yamada 1932, p. 38; Iwasa 1965, p. 49; cf. Bohner 1935, p. 199 and Varley 1980, pp. 60–61.

32 Yamada 1932, p. 39.

33 Aston 1993, vol. 1, p. 230.

34 Yamada 1932, p. 1; Bohner 1935, p. 177; Naumann 1994, p. 52.

35 *Tenka no banmin mina shinbutsu nari* 天下万民皆神物也. Yamada 1932, p. 547; Iwasa 2003, p. 157; cf. Bohner 1935, p. 309 and Varley 1980, p. 230.

and Indian Buddhist ideas in a clearly subordinate role—owes much to his close personal connection to Watarai 度会 (or Ise 伊勢) Shinto. Kitabatake was profoundly influenced by Watarai Ieyuki 度会家行 (1256–1356?), whose works he copied and whom he met at Ise for a secret initiation into Watarai Shinto. Based on oracles received by Amaterasu, Watarai Shinto stressed the “fundamental basis of heaven and earth” by “making the proper origin the origin.” Indeed, many arguments within Kitabatake’s skillful explanation of historical causation can already be seen in his work *Gengen shū* 元元集 of 1337, an eight volume historical compendium written in Ise during a temporary retreat from the battlefield.<sup>36</sup>

In short, Kitabatake adds an explicit political dimension to the earlier religious belief within the concept of *shinkoku* of the country as divinely protected. This dimension was born from the notion of a divinely initiated, unchangeable, yet always renewable and continuously living past. History thus is the very source of sacredness. Sacralized history constitutes the essence of the divine sovereign’s legitimacy, and is invoked to strengthen politically the contemporary heir of the correct and direct line of reign.

This leads us back to the second grand theme visible in Kitabatake’s work, according to Yamada Yoshio’s exegesis: Japan’s *kokutai*. The importance of *kokutai* and *shinkoku*—as well as the vital role of Kitabatake as the man who put these notions into words—was an almost ubiquitous theme in early Shōwa intellectual discourse. Contemporary foreign observers were of course not impervious to this fact. The American missionary and ethnologist, Daniel C. Holtom, in his 1943 study of Shinto nationalism in modern Japan, summarizes the religious basis and content of contemporary Japanese nationalism that is to be found in the Shinto concepts of *shinkoku* and *kokutai*:

Japan is “the Land of the Gods.” This is the name that patriots throughout a long history have liked to give to their homeland [...] it means that the very islands themselves, the people, their racial characteristics, and the unique form of their national life are something more than the resultants of ordinary geographical and historical forces. From the beginning they have received the far-distant future and gave to land and race and institutions an initial divine character that must be forever theirs. It means that these ancestral deities are eternally living in the spirit world from which they mold the destiny of the present according to their unchanging purposes.<sup>37</sup>

Holtom’s words encapsulate the ideas of *shinkoku* and *kokutai* as epitomized at that time by the Japanese Ministry of Education’s *Kokutai no hongī*. After quoting the *Jinnō shōtōki*’s opening passage on Japan as a land of the gods and describing these sentences as “an apt statement on the incomparable nature of our Imperial line,” the editors of *Kokutai no hongī* insist that “the spirit of the founding of the Empire has continued throughout history unbroken to the present time, and is a power that will transcend the morrow. Accordingly, in our country, national history begins and ends with national entity, and is a self-expression of [this] national entity.”<sup>38</sup>

36 The best English source on Watarai Shinto is Teeuwen 1996. On Kitabatake Chikafusa’s relation to Watarai Ieyuki, see pp. 151–62. Kitabatake’s views on Shinto are specifically dealt with in Shirayama 1984. See also Bohner 1935, pp. 178–79 and Naumann 1994, pp. 53–54.

37 Holtom 1963, pp. 13–14.

38 Hall, Gauntlett 1949, p. 106. Precisely the same idea lies behind Keigetsu’s claim, mentioned earlier, that all of Japan’s history starts with the *Jinnō shōtōki*, as found in his 1924 edition of the work for high school use.

Bohner with his often quaint diction, which intermingles deep and pensive words with lavish cadences of prose difficult to convey in lucid English, describes the *Jinnō shōtōki* as a book of intense “listening and response.” When everything seemed surrounded by darkness, Kitabatake hearkened attentively to history and history answered like an animated, soul-filled echo. Bohner, anticipating Holtom’s perception, adds that “the past from the earliest beginnings becomes relevant for present times, gives counsel, and truly comes to life; here and now, tomorrow, and in the remote future.”<sup>39</sup> Kitabatake’s concept of Shinto as seen in the *Jinnō shōtōki* is a perpetual working of the gods, due to which the continuously living past of the Japanese realm as a sacred entity is eternally alive in the present. For the contemporary Japanese observer, this work epitomized Japan’s divinely initiated eternal and unchanging *kokutai*. The influential national historian and Shinto priest, Hiraizumi Kiyoshi 平泉澄 (1895–1984), drew a similar conclusion: the nexus and apex of Japan’s national essence can be clearly seen in the *Jinnō shōtōki*.<sup>40</sup>

### *Jinnō shōtōki* and *Das Dritte Reich*

Besides explaining the book’s relevance in contemporary Japan, Bohner sought to orientate his German readers by seeking out correlations to and analogies with their own culture. In his introduction, he frequently alludes to similar concepts deployed *inter alios* by Otto von Bismarck, Giovanni Battista Vico, Johann Gottfried Herder, or Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as to comparable events in European history. For instance, Bohner compares the abortive thirteenth century Mongol invasion of Japan and the divine wind *kamikaze* 神風, which allegedly scattered the Mongol fleet, to the annihilation of the Spanish Armada. He points out that a commemorative medal was minted in England bearing the biblical motto *Deus afflavit et dissipati sunt* (“God blew and they were dispersed”). Bohner considered one particular work to possess a mystique of the national ideal with a personified, living, and eternal history similar to that expressed in the *Jinnō shōtōki*. This was Arthur Moeller van den Bruck’s *Das dritte Reich* of 1923. Bohner refers to it directly several times, often echoes its opinions, and in one section, quotes extensively over more than three pages.<sup>41</sup>

Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876–1925) was not a politician, but an art historian, literary bohemian, and political commentator. He lived several years abroad, mainly in Italy and France, returning to Germany shortly before the outbreak of World War I. He spent the war years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Press and News Bureau, where he was responsible for refining propaganda releases. At the same time, he continued to publish his own essays on art, politics, architecture, Dostoyevsky, and his hatred for “the West,” especially for France as Germany’s major adversary in the war.<sup>42</sup> As the American professor of political science, Gerhard Krebs, observed in the early 1940s, Moeller’s experiences

39 Bohner 1935, p. 12.

40 Hiraizumi 1933.

41 Without indicating the actual page numbers, smaller omissions in between, or the reshuffle in the middle, Bohner 1935, pp. 12–14 consecutively quotes pp. 235–37 and pp. 232–34 of Moeller van den Bruck 1931. Unfortunately, it could not be verified whether Bohner quoted from this or the original 1923 edition. It is plausible that the textual shuffle and even some of the omissions from Bohner’s quote were in fact the later work of Moeller’s acquaintance, Hans Schwarz, who edited the posthumous third edition of Moeller’s book, the only edition easily available today.

42 Laurysens 1999, p. 40.

abroad as well as the destruction of the war made him “ultimately discover the eternal Germany beyond the state, namely, the German nation, of which he was by birth a part and from which, he found, one could not secede at will.”<sup>43</sup> Slowly, Moeller developed his own theories of Germany’s downfall, and also formed a vision of her recovery and return to a leading position in the world. At the same time as Oswald Spengler was painting a depressing picture of the period in his famous work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West), which attributed an innate “Faustian soul” to the occident that ultimately would lead to its destruction, Moeller’s *Das dritte Reich* gave chiliastic hope for a better future. He paired an almost eschatological universalism with a socialism centered on the nation as a cultural unit, thus mythologizing the German “cultural soul,” the aspect that would overcome the destruction, chaos, and perceived mistreatment by the Western powers after World War I. Profoundly inspiring Hitler with his ideas, Moeller van den Bruck adopted and greatly popularized the famous concept of a “Third Reich” lasting for a thousand years.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Moeller in his preface prophesized that

the idea of the Third Reich is *an idea of Weltanschauung* that elevates above reality. [...] The German people are only too inclined to cherish self-delusion. The idea of the Third Reich could become the biggest of all self-delusions it ever harbored. It would be very German if it would rely on, and if it would soothe itself with, this idea. It could be destroyed by this idea. This has to be pointed out. The idea of the Third Reich, which, as our highest and ultimate idea of *Weltanschauung*, we cannot give up, can be fertile only *as an idea of reality*: when we manage to carry it away from the illusionary and fully integrate it into the political [...].<sup>45</sup>

He thus called for the “politicization of the German nation.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to his literary endeavors, Moeller van den Bruck in 1919 co-founded and became the doyen of an influential conservative debating circle called the “June Club,” in bitter reminiscence of the Treaty of Versailles that was signed on 28 June 1919. It was here that Adolf Hitler delivered one of his first political speeches.<sup>47</sup> In a private debate after this speech, Hitler was noticeably impressed by Moeller van den Bruck and his group’s vision. Moeller van den Bruck on the other hand was rather critical. He saw Hitler distorting the message with his “proletarian crudeness,” and until his death in 1925 kept his distance from the national-socialist activities represented by Hitler.<sup>48</sup> Although neither mentions the other, *Das dritte Reich*, published in 1923, and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* of 1925–1926 show parallels

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43 Krebs 1941, p. 1086.

44 On the long history of the concept of an everlasting (“Imperium sine fine”) Third Reich (“Tertium regnum”) from the time of the first Roman Empire and the early Christian church, see Dempf 1931.

45 Moeller van den Bruck 1931, p. 7 (emphasis in the original).

46 Moeller van den Bruck 1931, p. 8.

47 Prominent members of the June Club were, for instance, the wealthy steel magnate Heinrich von Gleichen, art critic Paul Fechter, political activist Otto Strasser, the later Reich Chancellors Heinrich Brüning and Franz von Papen, as well as Albrecht Haushofer, who later was indicted in the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler (Lauryssens 1999, pp. 55–56). The SS subsequently shot Haushofer in April 1945. Incidentally, his father, Karl Haushofer, a famous professor of geopolitics with close relations to Rudolf Hess as well as Japan, wrote a long review-article on Bohner’s *Jinnō shōtōki* translation, comparing it to Dante’s roughly contemporary work *Divina Comedia* (cf. Haushofer 1938).

48 Schwierskott 1962, pp. 144–45.

in their thinking and arguments. Both, for instance, contain many unfounded ideas mixed with a large dose of mysticism. A major difference, however, is that Hitler sees the new Germany built on racial purity that is biological, whereas Moeller van den Bruck calls for a spiritual racial purity.<sup>49</sup> In a 1974 interview, Otto Strasser, a good friend of Moeller and also closely acquainted with Hitler from 1921, reminisced that:

[Hitler] stole a revolutionary idea equal to *Das Kapital* and *The Origin of Species* from under the nose of one of my best friends. Without Hitler, Moeller van den Bruck would have become a household name, on a par with Marx and Charles Darwin. [...] Moeller van den Bruck took his life on the day he realized that Hitler was betraying his ideal. [...] Hitler, of course, had borrowed the title of Moeller van den Bruck’s book for his own use. People tend to ignore it today, but up to 1930 *The Third Reich* was widely read and discussed in Germany, much more so than *Mein Kampf*.<sup>50</sup> [...] This got on Hitler’s nerves and he ordered Alfred Rosenberg to start a smear campaign in the [newspaper] *Völkischer Beobachter* against Moeller van den Bruck.<sup>51</sup>

According to Strasser, after raids on his home and the confiscation of his private papers, letters, and manuscripts, Moeller van den Bruck’s books were among those publicly burned shortly after midnight on 10 May 1933 in huge bonfires on Berlin’s Opernplatz. Unfortunately, Strasser’s report cannot be verified. It does seem to be the case, however, that up until the early 1930s, much homage was paid to Moeller van den Bruck by national-socialist officials. For instance, a contemporary German observer, trying to elucidate the “spiritual foundation [...] upon which the present national-socialism is based” in a presentation before a scholarly society just a week after Hitler came to power in March 1933, declared that “[t]hese foundations were essentially laid by a single man: Moeller van den Bruck.”<sup>52</sup> After Hitler’s assumption of power, however, this praise quickly fell silent, and once the dictatorship had established itself, Hitler set about discrediting Moeller van den Bruck. Moeller van den Bruck’s approach and intentions were even termed “un-German” and “not leading towards national-socialism.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, Strasser is correct to state that “His name had to be erased from the conscience of the German people because Hitler was the visionary, not a mentally unstable dandy and a despised intellectual who shot himself in a mental asylum. [...] With *The Third Reich* out of the way, Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was promoted as the highest form of literary art.”<sup>54</sup>

*Das dritte Reich* was Moeller van den Bruck’s final statement of his belief in a “new nationalism.” It accused, challenged, and appealed in a style as forceful as Nietzsche’s exclamatory manner of writing. It was the passionate manifesto of an embittered patriot in whom despair was mingled with hope for a promising future. In broad strokes, it paints

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49 Krebs 1941, pp. 1103–1104.

50 According to Strasser, 130,000 copies of *Das dritte Reich* had been sold by 1933. In comparison, Hitler’s book had sold about 24,000 copies by 1930, according to a publisher’s royalties ledger that was later confiscated (Lauryssens 1999, pp. 150 and 152). Despite Strasser’s assertion, however, it is not necessarily the case that Hitler adopted the concept of a “Third Reich” exclusively from Moeller, as the concept had already existed for many centuries; see note 44 above.

51 Lauryssens 1999, p. 150.

52 Adam 1933, p. 8.

53 Schwierskott 1962, pp. 150–52.

54 Lauryssens 1999, p. 151.

the glorious history of the First Reich, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, the Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicæ, which lasted from 800 to 1806, and the Second Reich, the Wilhelmine German Empire of 1871 to 1918. It is a painstakingly meticulous manuscript full of contrasting poetic visions, grand prophecies, and apocalyptic predictions.<sup>55</sup> Moeller van den Bruck asserts that the wish to unite all Germans into one Reich had been a central feature of German patriotism and statesmanship for centuries. On every page, he professes a spiritual kinship to Hegel, Nietzsche, or Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the British-born author of such works as *Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century), published in 1899. This was to be one of the main sources for the pan-Germanic movement of the early twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> Moeller van den Bruck's book, in its juggling of images, moods, and ideas as well as its mystifying of practical problems into abstract ideological questions of principle, is a typical example of "political romanticism."<sup>57</sup> The conservative revolution that Moeller van den Bruck summoned to usher in the Third Reich would, as he says, remain within the "continuity of history" and thus had for its support "the momentum of the millennia that lie behind."<sup>58</sup>

Hermann Böhner's aim was to illustrate the inner affinity of both worlds and to bring the *Jinnō shōtōki* "closer to those who otherwise might have no connection to its overall character." In so doing, he likened Kitabatake's work to Moeller van den Bruck's *Das dritte Reich* maintaining both were concerned with the same ultimate question of "who we are." Böhner furthermore claimed that both texts were "conversations with God," "self-dialogs," and "conversations with the eminent Us." He portrays their apparently similar contents as well as both authors' experiences in highly emotive terms: "As though by a gigantic, transcendent epiphany, a Dæmonion,<sup>59</sup> a personality, which like every Ego is real and yet not tangible, each author is faced by the personality of his own nation."<sup>60</sup> The respective nation's personality for both authors is thus mirrored in the national ideal of a divinely inspired continuously living past. In other words, as Böhner sees it, they share the mystique of a transcendent eternal history, responsive to the pivotal ultimate question of "who we are." Such comparison was designed to enable the German audience better to appreciate and acquaint themselves with the *Jinnō shōtōki*.

Why then did Böhner chose Moeller van der Bruck's work as a foil for comparison? The answer may be found in his personal and intellectual background.

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55 Lauryssens 1999, p. 102.

56 Houston Stewart Chamberlain later assumed German citizenship and became the son-in-law of the German composer, Richard Wagner. Interestingly, he was also the brother of the well-known British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain.

57 Kaltenbrunner 1969, p. 146.

58 Cited in Krebs 1941, p. 1089.

59 Dæmonion is a mystical inner voice in Socratic terminology that controls one's fate and averts one from making mistakes. Often taken to be what we would call "intuition," it is rather a form of "divine madness"—a gift from the gods that inspires poetry, mysticism, love, music, and even philosophy itself. Socrates' characterization of the phenomenon as "dæmonic" suggests that its origin is divine, mysterious, and independent of a person's own thoughts.

60 Böhner 1935, p. 12.



Hermann Bohner in his study in the 1930s (photo courtesy of Rudolf Wolfgang Müller).

### **Hermann Bohner on Politics and Theology**

The German Federal Archives contain very few documents pertaining directly to Hermann Bohner, which indicates that he had only rare “official contact” with the government of the German Reich. Any assessment of his political persuasion has to rely on circumstantial evidence. Some correspondence dated 30 November 1937 can be found in the so-called “Amt Rosenberg.”<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, the Office of Foreign Relations recommended Bohner, who just had returned to Japan a few weeks earlier after a half-year stay in Germany, for possible talks and lectures as an expert on Japan and the Far East, should he return again to Germany for a longer home leave.<sup>62</sup> Two letters, dated 5 June 1937 and 26 April 1938, between the Sinologists Walter Fuchs, who was in China, and Fritz Jäger, Professor at the University of Hamburg, mention that earlier in 1937 Bohner had been offered an appointment at the University of Munich, but for unknown reasons the negotiations had come to nothing. In the 1938 letter, Jäger writes that the University of Leipzig was also looking for a Japanologist and Bohner would probably be the first choice.<sup>63</sup> In Bohner’s personnel file at the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, however, there is no record of an offer of employment at Munich, but an entry dated 6 February 1940 does mention that he declined the chair in Leipzig.<sup>64</sup> A report by the Saxon State Ministry of Education to the Reich Ministry describes how, after more than eight months of fruitless negotiations, during

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61 This was the department under the direction of Alfred Rosenberg who functioned as “the Führer’s representative for the control of the NSDAP’s complete intellectual and ideological training and education.”

62 BArch, NS 15/27, Bl. 241 and NS 15/260, Bl. 47.

63 Walravens 2005, pp. 125 and 132.

64 BArch [ehem. BDC] R 4901, No. B 1091.

which Bohner drove the responsible officials to despair, they terminated their offer.<sup>65</sup> An entry for 1942 in Bohner's file mentions that he was again suggested for Leipzig and in 1943 for Vienna and Frankfurt.<sup>66</sup> Be that as it may, Bohner never in fact held a chair in Germany and instead, was active in his adopted country Japan. Entries for 25 March, 8 July, and 12 August 1941 indicate exchanges between the Office of Foreign Relations, the Office of the President, and the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture concerning the possibility of awarding Bohner the honorary title of professor. This however was "at the moment declined," although it is not clear whether a government office or Bohner himself was responsible for this decision.<sup>67</sup>

After the war, on 10 December 1954, President Theodor Heuss awarded Bohner the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for his longtime contributions to Japanese-German cultural relations.<sup>68</sup> The decoration was presented by the German consul general of Osaka-Kobe on 1 February 1955 at a special meeting of the German East-Asiatic Society's regional branch in Kobe.<sup>69</sup> The citation for this honor mentions Bohner's earlier receipt of the Japanese Fifth Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold and Silver Rays (*Kun gotō zuihō shō* 勲五等瑞宝章). This award was typically bestowed on civil servants who devoted themselves to the state. As lecturer in German, history, literature, and Greek at Ōsaka Gaikokugo Gakkō 大阪外国語学校 from April 1922 and thus a civil servant of the Imperial Japanese government, Bohner of course had had to adhere to the guiding principles of education as outlined in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, which manifested the state's *kokutai* doctrine.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, on 1 October 1935 Bohner became a (rather reluctant) member of the National Socialist Teachers' Organization, which also maintained chapters abroad, as his membership card shows.<sup>71</sup>

While there is no indication that Bohner was a member of the Nazi party, he had some direct relations with the German government. For example, he received a monthly stipend of three hundred Reichsmark for the period of 1 April 1944 to 31 March 1945.<sup>72</sup> The last entry in his personnel file at the Reich Ministry, dated 12 February 1945, approves this research stipend.<sup>73</sup> However, the printing of Bohner's *Jinnō shōtōki* translation in 1935 and 1939 was not funded by German money. Instead, the printing cost was financed by the conservative Harada Shakuzenkai 原田積善會 founded in 1920 by the banker Harada Jirō 原田二郎 (1849–1930). It should also be noted that the Japanese-German Cultural Institute, which published the translation, functioned as a rather one-way instrument of cultural

65 Worm 1994, pp. 177–78.

66 BArch [ehem. BDC] R 4901, No. B 1091.

67 BArch [ehem. BDC] R 4901, No. B 1091.

68 The award was based on Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's 16 November 1954 list of proposals no. 319.

69 BArch, B122/38.721.

70 The Imperial Rescript on Education is the first official state document in the Meiji period that uses the word *kokutai*. It begins by saying: "Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire (*waga kokutai no seika* 我々國體ノ精華), and herein also lies the source of Our education."

71 BArch [ehem. BDC] NS 12/1840, No. 326471.

72 This monthly stipend had been approved in continuation of a research stipend granted on 5 May 1943 as stated in a letter of 1 February 1945 by the president of the German Research Foundation to the Office of Foreign Relations and the Reich Ministry of Sciences, Education, and Culture. See BArch [ehem. BDC] DS/W.

73 BArch [ehem. BDC] R 4901/No. B 1091.

propaganda for the Japanese cause. Nevertheless, the two successive German co-directors at the time the two volumes appeared—Wilhelm Gundert and Walter Donat—were both deeply involved in the Nazi political machinery, and did their best to propagate Nazi policies among the German community in Japan.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, in 1942 the German embassy in Tokyo commissioned Bohner to compile a book of “fairy-tales and stories from Japan,” intended to be used as a Christmas present for German children in the Far East.<sup>75</sup>

During the height of the war, Bohner furthermore contributed three articles to the monthly journal *The XXth Century*. This English language journal, published in Japanese-occupied Shanghai from October 1941 until June 1945, was financed by the German Foreign Office. While by no means an outright propaganda tool, it nevertheless carried regular contributions from high officials of both Japan and Germany. These officials include Honma Masaharu 本間雅晴 (1888–1946), the Japanese general who conquered the Philippines and faced the death penalty after the war, and Baldur von Schirach (1907–1974), the Nazi youth leader and head of the Nazi administrative district of Vienna, who was also later convicted of war crimes. Bohner, however, was apparently invited to contribute articles due to his expertise on Japanese history and thought, and not on account of his Nazi sympathies. In his introductory remarks to Bohner’s first article entitled “Mirror, Sword, and Jewel,” published in January 1942, the journal’s editor-in-chief Klaus Mehnert (1906–1984) wrote:

[I]t is necessary to consider realities and facts, but once in a while we should also turn to the imponderables, to the invisible essence of a nation, her spirit and ideas, on which she must rely in times of decision. So we have asked a man who stands outside of the political controversies of the day to write on what he would consider the essence of Japan.<sup>76</sup>

The other two articles that Bohner published in this journal were “The Path of the Bushi” in April 1943 (4:44) and “The Battle of Sekigahara” in April 1944 (6:50) respectively.

Mehnert’s claim that Bohner kept a distance from politics is further supported by the fact that after the war, Bohner was neither interned by the allied occupational powers nor was he repatriated like the vast majority of Germans in Japan. As a close acquaintance described him in a personal reminiscence, Bohner was a rather apolitical and shy person, who often kept his distance from others as he suspected they might take advantage of him and his knowledge.<sup>77</sup> He has frequently been portrayed as a somewhat eccentric, solitary person. Besides, his early background in the *Wandervogel* youth movement, with its romantic ethos of getting back to nature, freedom, and pristine folk-culture, fostered his love for long hikes in the history-steeped Yamato basin.<sup>78</sup> Bohner, in extensive annotations to *Jinnō shōtōki*, also provides a wealth of detail about geographical locations and their connection to mystic stories and real history. He moreover explicitly writes at the beginning of his volume of annotations that “history emanates from the local sphere.”<sup>79</sup>

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74 Hack 1995 and Worm 1994.

75 Bohner 1955, p. 37.

76 *The XXth Century* 2:7, p. 29.

77 Schinzinger 1981, pp. 21–23.

78 Gundert 1964, p. 3.

79 “Geschichte geht vom Raum aus” (Bohner 1939, p. 1).

Bohner's poetic-mystical and ornate diction might be attributed to the Protestant environment in which he was originally trained as a missionary and theologian. Indeed, throughout his life in Japan he held services for the German community in the Osaka-Kobe area.<sup>80</sup> His attempt to elucidate the *Jinnō shōtōki* with extensive quotes from Moeller van den Bruck is most probably not to be explained by his sympathy with Nazism, or by the Nazi use of Moeller van den Bruck's ideas. Rather, the explanation is perhaps to be found in his naïve yet deeply felt spiritual affinity with Moeller van den Bruck's metaphysical grandeur. It must be noted that Moeller van den Bruck was himself inspired not only by Nietzsche, Wagner, Chamberlain, and Stefan George, but also by the Protestant thought of Martin Luther. Moreover, Moeller van den Bruck himself was a descendent of a family with a long tradition of evangelical ministry, traceable to the late seventeenth century.<sup>81</sup> Hermann Bohner too was born into a missionary family and had studied protestant theology and philosophy at the University of Tübingen in southern Germany.<sup>82</sup> Hermann's wife, Hanna Blumhardt, whom he first met in Tsingtao, and Richard Wilhelm, his teacher and friend, both came from the nearby village of Bad Boll at the foot of the Swabian Alps, where Wilhelm also worked as a vicar before being sent as a missionary to China.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, Bohner went to Tsingtao in summer 1914 to take up a post at the local missionary school. Just like Richard Wilhelm, he went there as a member of the Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein. This mission society had been founded in 1884 and only a year later began its work in China and Japan.<sup>84</sup> It was in that society's journal, *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft*, that Bohner's first Japan-related article was published in 1927.

Hermann Bohner was thus brought up within evangelical Protestantism and stayed for most of his life closely connected to its worldview, or more precisely, that of Württemberg or "Swabian" Pietism. Pietism at that time regarded the prevailing Christian orthodoxy as spiritually unproductive and found its roots, in part, in the mystical spirituality of an earlier era and the power of individual meditation on the divine. Swabian Pietism especially, often echoed mysticism with its reliance on intensity of feeling and sentiment, over ritual or intellect, as the technique to experience the intimacy as well as ultimate spiritual reality of God. It is furthermore well documented that amid the contemporaneous conservative stock of ideas, revivalist pietism eagerly fused with romanticism and thus helped to form the uniquely metaphysical, idealistic nature of German romantic philosophy.<sup>85</sup>

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80 Schinzinger 1981, p. 26.

81 Lairyssens 1999, p. 114.

82 Hermann Bohner was born on 8 December 1884 in Abokobi in the Gold Coast. His father Heinrich was stationed in Africa for thirty five years as a missionary for the protestant Basel Mission Society.

83 Hermann Bohner and Richard Wilhelm also were brothers-in-law as Wilhelm was married to Hanna's sister Salome Blumhardt. Their father Christoph and grandfather Johann Blumhardt were famous Protestant pastors, who greatly influenced the discourse on Christian eschatology with their ideas on the perennial in-breaking of God's kingdom into the present. In Bad Boll, the Blumhardts hosted an informal literary and theological salon frequented by such famous literati as Hermann Hesse and Karl Barth. Hesse was the grandson of the India missionary Hermann Gundert and thus the cousin of the Japan missionary Wilhelm Gundert, one of the two German co-directors of the Japanese-German Cultural Institute who also had studied theology in nearby Tübingen.

84 In 1929, the Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein (General Evangelical Protestant Mission Society) changed its name to Ostasienmission or East Asia Mission. After a split-up during World War II, its main successor today is the Deutsche Ostasienmission, DOAM.

85 Schwierskott 1962, p. 89.

All things considered, it seems evident that Hermann Böhner’s extensive quotes from Moeller van den Bruck’s *Das dritte Reich* in his explanations of the *Jinnō shōtōki* were not due to his propensity for the Hitler-style “Germanomania” of the 1930s and 40s. Rather, a more persuasive explanation is to be found in his philosophic-theological upbringing and the prevailing European *Zeitgeist* prior to his settling in East Asia. Böhner may best be characterized as a “national romanticist” who, in the words of one obituary writer, felt it his “mission to trace the ‘divine’ in Japan.”<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The title of this essay, “A Living Past as the Nation’s Personality,” is taken from Hermann Böhner’s comparative assessment of the *Jinnō shōtōki* and *Das Dritte Reich*. Some further clarification is finally in order. The concept of “nation” signifies here a “cultural community” of people living in a particular place and sharing the “eternal common value” of a unifying past that lives on into the present as the center of their cultural sphere. Böhner saw how both Kitabatake Chikafusa and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck in a particularly dark moment for their respective nations tried, through their writings, to re-invoke a spirit of the past, elevate this spirit into a transcendental beacon, and thus bring hope for a renewed and glorious future. Hermann Böhner evoked their affinity in accordance with his own background of pietistic mysticism and thus endeavored to bridge the gap between the “*Deutschtum und Japanertum*” (German-ness and Japanese-ness) articulated by these two paragons of national consciousness.<sup>87</sup>

From early on, Böhner called the *Jinnō shōtōki* a “Shintō theodicy.” Another prominent German commentator on Japanese-German relations during the 1930s, Karl Haushofer, labeled it a “theodicy of the Reich,” of the [national] realm. He saw in the *Jinnō shōtōki*’s grand narrative “its author’s flight of mind (*Seelenflucht*) into the nation’s eternity.”<sup>88</sup> Although on the surface these descriptions might appear quite different, they are actually not that far removed from Moeller van den Bruck’s “Third” or “Thousand Year Reich.” This Reich “restores the nation’s ‘eternal values,’ without which man loses contact with nature and with God.”<sup>89</sup> For Moeller van den Bruck, nature expresses its will through nations and is a composite of many elements: geographic factors, economic spheres, and individual genius. Behind these, there may be still mightier forces at work: cosmic relationships, in which physical relations are linked with metaphysical necessities.<sup>90</sup> The German word *Reich*—derived from the Latin word *regnum*, i.e. “reign”—means realm or kingdom. However, in this specific German context, it designates not only a kingdom of governments and politics, but also a kingdom of the spirit.<sup>91</sup> Moeller van den Bruck’s vision of this new German *Reich*

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86 Gundert 1964, p. 3.

87 Böhner 1935, p. 12.

88 Haushofer 1938, pp. 156 and 162.

89 Laurysens 1999, p. 104.

90 Krebs 1941, p. 1093, note 12.

91 During the early centuries of the Holy Roman Empire, the Emperor had the special authority to appoint the Pope. In reciprocation, the Pope would crown the next Emperor. Disputes over investiture eventually led to conflicts between secular and religious powers. The sovereigns’ belief in the Divine Right of Kings as well as struggles for primacy and hegemony between the throne and altar, or state and papacy, continued into the late nineteenth century and the so-called *Kulturkampf* for cultural struggle between Prussia and Rome.

has an unmistakably sacred and even eschatological dimension.<sup>92</sup> Its bearers, according to Moeller van den Bruck, possess the quality of leadership as an inborn gift coming from the “inherited knowledge” of historical relationships, which they have “in their blood.”<sup>93</sup> With all its mystic associations, such a *Reich* thus combines *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. In Bohner’s assessment, this *Reich* is similar to the Japanese concept of a divinely initiated “national polity” that manifests in the perpetual reign of a sacred line of “divine sovereigns.” Indeed, Alois Dempf, a contemporary Catholic philosopher and historian, commented in 1931 on Moeller van den Bruck’s allusions and prophecies in *Das dritte Reich*, arguing it was common to all humanity to believe in the “divine ordination” of history.<sup>94</sup>

Moeller van den Bruck was insistent that the state was “related to the two notions [of ‘throne’ and ‘altar’] and their two spheres thus seem intertwined [... T]he father-figure of the nation and the father-figure of God complement one another and form a unity upon which the state is based. Throne and altar guarantee the permanency of temporal matters and timeless resolutions.”<sup>95</sup> The belief in a sacred history and a nation’s divine providence is by necessity intertwined with ideas about practical politics. In his *Jinnō shōtōki*, Kitabatake at one point explicitly writes that “in antiquity, deity (*kami* 神) and sovereign (*kimi* 皇) were one entity and therefore [the expression] ‘to preside over rituals (*matsuri* 祭)’ meant ‘to preside over government (*matsurigoto* 政).”<sup>96</sup> Kitabatake uses the compound word “*jinnō*” 神皇 or “divinity–sovereign” in the title of his work, and this inherent unity between the sacred and the sovereign and the “correct succession” (*shōtō* 正統) has been interpreted as Kitabatake’s view on the origin of Shinto itself.<sup>97</sup> In other words, Shinto for Kitabatake centers on *saisei itchi* 祭政一致, the unity of ritual and politics manifested in the divine sovereign. The emperor as high priest performs state rituals (*sai*, *matsuri*), while as political sovereign he oversees government (*sei*, *matsurigoto*). The imperial office in short is defined by the unity (*itchi*) of these two functions.

Kitabatake’s articulation of such a view of “sacred politics,” or practically applied “political theology,” is what makes his work—and by extension Bohner’s translation—momentous in the eyes of early twentieth century observers in both Germany and Japan. Kitabatake was a vital voice in the articulation of notions of *kokutai* and *shinkoku* that were imperative in early Shōwa intellectual discourse. Thus, years of continuously amplified state indoctrination since the Meiji period culminated in a renewed assessment of *Jinnō shōtōki* as a true “Bible-book of folk national weltanschauung and a standard work of national education.” This is what was truly significant for the nationalist agenda of both Japan and Germany.

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92 Kaltenbrunner 1969, p. 152.

93 Krebs 1941, p. 1099.

94 Dempf 1931, p. 171.

95 Moeller van den Bruck 1931, p. 233.

96 Yamada 1932, p. 217; Iwasa 1965, p. 97; cf. Bohner 1935, p. 246 and Varley 1980, p. 131.

97 Shirayama 1984, p. 257; Nauman 1994, p. 49.

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MN: *Monumenta Nipponica*

NOAG: *Nachrichten der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*

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