

*Karl Haushofer und Japan:  
Die Rezeption seiner geopolitischen Theorien  
in der deutschen und japanischen Politik*  
[Karl Haushofer and Japan: The Reception of His Geopolitical  
Theories in German and Japanese Politics]

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Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), Bavarian general, professor, and prolific writer has attracted attention mainly because of his role during the “Third Reich,” which was turned by war propaganda into “the man behind Hitler.” It is also well known that he had a special interest in Japan, and Japanese scholars often referred to his geopolitical ideas but so far there is no in-depth investigation of Haushofer as an important figure and mediator in German-Japanese relations and the reception of his geopolitical theories involving Japan - both in Germany and Japan. The present massive study therefore focuses on these aspects to fill an important gap. The book’s author has been working and teaching in Japan for years and perused Japanese sources, published and unpublished, to track the geopolitical influence of Haushofer as well as Germany, and now provides a carefully documented view of the subject.

The work is divided into six main chapters: the first chapter offers a preface, the current state of research and ends with information on the sources and defines the questions to be dealt with. Readers may profit from returning to this introductory chapter after finishing the book, especially if they are not already familiar with geopolitics and its

development, since plenty of basic information is provided in the following chapters. The second chapter traces Haushofer's life and career as a geopolitician and an expert on Japan. Chapter three deals with geopolitics and the theory of foreign policy, including the development of geopolitics in Germany and its instrumentalization as a propaganda tool. Haushofer as a mediator between Germany and Japan is the subject of chapter four, in which German influence on the development of geopolitics in Japan is also traced. Chapter five investigates the role geopolitics played, in theory and practice, in the Japanese expansion while the final chapter sums up preceding chapters and presents a conclusion. Besides a list of abbreviations and a glossary of important and frequently used Japanese terms, there is an index of personal names and an overwhelming bibliography, including unpublished sources, occupying almost two hundred pages. As the author points out, his work was not designed to be a Japanological study and therefore inserting *kanji* was dispensed with; this is quite understandable and most readers probably would not profit from them. With regard to the index of Japanese names, however, it might have been useful to have *kanji* considering the ambiguities involved in reading Japanese names and for the purpose of facilitating further research. In addition, there are no less than seventeen appendices: 1. Haushofer's works in Japanese university libraries; 2. Haushofer's curriculum vitae; 3. Haushofer's trip to Japan (itineraries); 4. Haushofer's reading material before his voyage to East Asia; 5. Drawing of the Hōon-in temple where the Haushofers lived near Kyoto; 6. A list of names of Haushofer's "Japanese relations of lasting value"; 7. Biographical entries from the Brockhaus' encyclopedia (1906); 8. A comparison between two Haushofer documents, his "Personal Difficulties" and "Final Interrogation Report" (1945) (to reveal apologetic efforts); 9. Japanese professional journals in the fields of geography and geopolitics; 10. The summer workshop on geopolitics organized by the Japanese Society for Geopolitics in 1942; 11. Statistical breakdown of the journal *Chiseigaku*; 12. The Pacific Society (*Taiheiyō*

*kyōkai*); 13. Japanese renderings of “geopolitics”; 14. The representatives of the Tokyo school of Japanese geopolitics; 15. Members of the Yoshida no kai; 16. The framework of the Kyoto School of Japanese geopolitics; 17. Albrecht Haushofer’s “Weltfahrt” [Trip around the World] 1937: Japanese contacts.

The author has taken great pains to document his statements, and in general one quarter to one third of each page is covered by footnotes; these annotations are not restricted to bibliographical references but provide further information, quotations and form a very important part of the study. In order to facilitate reading, the author concludes each chapter with an abstract or conclusion which proves quite helpful.

Karl Haushofer came from a family of academic teachers - his grandfathers were respectively a painter and professor at the Prague Academy of Arts, and a professor at the University of Munich, while his father held the chair of Staatswissenschaften (“sciences off the state” which developed later into political science) at the Technical University of Munich. Karl entered a military career by studying and teaching at the military academy and also engaged in active service, especially during World War I at the end of which he was appointed major-general. The decisive event that led to his future vocation and a second career was when he was sent as a Bavarian military observer to Japan in 1908. This was triggered by a transfer to a post in the province that he disliked and depressed him. So when the opportunity arose, he applied for the mission. This was by no means a position like a military attaché, or an instructor: the term *observer* was used in its literal meaning, moreover the appointed person had to cover most of the expenses himself. In Haushofer’s case, this was only possible because his father-in-law agreed to step in, along with encouragement from his wife Martha (1877-1946) to grab such an opportunity and who later decided to accompany him to Japan. Martha was certainly the more enterprising and outgoing of the two for she had a good talent for picking up languages and developed a practical command of the Japanese colloquial. She also helped her

husband with his papers and publications and supported him wherever possible so that, in all fairness, one may say that Haushofer would never have become so successful without the assistance of his wife.

By the time Haushofer returned from Japan, he was already well known in the Bavarian military and was asked to personally report to the Bavarian Prince-Regent Luitpold, to the Reichsmarineamt and the Foreign Office in Berlin. In Japan he had tried and managed to get in contact with important and influential officers and politicians, and settled for part of his stay in Kyoto, instead of “wasting” his time in the foreign community in Tokyo. It certainly helped that his father's academic work was known in Japan, and that many well educated Japanese had studied in Germany, or at least visited the country. One may call it luck, or an auspicious constellation, but Haushofer actively tried to make connections and stay in touch with them later on, despite World War I and the difficult times afterwards. It has been pointed out by a number of Haushofer's acquaintances that “he understood the Japanese and their mentality”: he was probably a good listener, showed a polite, polished behavior and sympathy for Japan and the Japanese, which was also expressed in his many publications. These personal qualities helped him keep his connections and build his reputation until the end of his life.

Haushofer saw the value of military observers in a very critical light; he emphasized, however, that such an appointment might be of the highest value for the respective individual (like himself). Later on he stated that Germany might learn a lot from Japan, not in terms of technology, but patriotic mentality, determination, and a maritime view as opposed to the prevalent continental view in Germany. In the context of Haushofer's theories it is noteworthy that he went to Japan by boat via India, Ceylon, Singapore (that is, the tropics which he later called the “monsoon countries”) and returned via the Trans-Siberian Railway, which certainly influenced his continental block theory in some way. In general, Haushofer was not fond of travelling, and he preferred to stay in his native Munich. He never returned to Japan and concrete plans for

another trip did not materialize for one reason or another. One may justly state that without his “world trip” of two years between 1908 and 1910 by boat and rail, he would never have developed his concept of worldwide foreign policy. Aside from his war experiences, it was the Japan appointment that strengthened his confidence and a sense of mission that drove him on.

In a way, Haushofer’s second career was already in the making after his return from Japan. As he was suffering from serious health problems, he was unable to work and had to take leave. While recuperating in Arosa, Martha, in order to distract him, persuaded her husband to write a book on Japan and together they managed to finish *Dai Nihon* within three months. Afterwards, he still had some of his leave left and Martha urged her husband to take his doctoral degree. So, he arranged with the Munich geographer Erich von Drygalski to write a thesis on *Der deutsche Anteil an der geographischen Erschließung Japans und des subjapanischen Erdraums, und deren Förderung durch den Einfluß von Krieg und Wehrpolitik* (The German Share of the Geographical Exploration of Japan and the Sub-Japanese Areas, and Its Promotion through the Influence of War and Military Politics). He continued to read geography after this thesis, and during the war, it dawned upon him that his future might lie in the field of geopolitics when he came across Rudolf Kjellén’s (1864-1922) *Der Staat als Lebensform* and *Die Großmächte der Gegenwart*. In 1919, Haushofer took his habilitation (thesis required for teaching at a university) and submitted *Grundrichtungen in der geographischen Entwicklung des japanischen Reiches* (Basic Directions of the Geographical Development of the Japanese Empire), again encouraged and supported by his wife.

From then on, he taught as Privatdozent (unsalaried lecturer) and as *Honorar professor* from 1921 at the Geographical Institute of the University of Munich. Only in 1933 was Haushofer officially appointed as a full professor, but no chair was created for him. This suited him well because he was kept busy with his manifold activities, so he was quite

satisfied with the title. He received invitations to chairs at other universities but declined as he was not interested in leaving Munich. Haushofer gave approximately eighty classes at the university over the years of which almost a third dealt with military issues in the widest sense. Perhaps a quarter, with a decreasing tendency, were devoted to Asian-Pacific subjects. Nevertheless, in general, Haushofer liked to draw attention to East Asian parallels or examples and seems to have been popular with his students. In academia, he found much acclaim because of his presence in the media, his many publications, his position as a university professor, also as editor of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, and as co-founder of the *Deutsche Akademie* founded in 1925 sort of as a predecessor to the Goethe Institute. However, he was also considered an outsider by some colleagues as he was not a trained geographer, and geopolitics was not yet acknowledged as an academic discipline. He was certainly not recognized as a Japanologist by colleagues from that field: Japanology in those days basically meant a language-oriented discipline, a branch of philology where other fields might be included as long as their methods were largely text-based. Therefore, historians of merit like Ludwig Riess<sup>1</sup> and Oskar Nachod<sup>2</sup> were kept in high esteem, yet would not be called Japanologists. Japanese Studies without the basis of Japanese texts were classified as “Japankunde.” One of the few contacts Haushofer had among Japanologists was Friedrich M. Trautz (1877-1952), who had been to Japan as a military observer. Trautz quit his military career to protest “Stresemann politics,” acquired a doctoral degree in Japanese Studies, then took his habilitation and became German director of the newly established Japan Institute in Berlin. He

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<sup>1</sup> 1861-1929, cf. Kentarō Hayashi, “Ludwig Riess, Einer Der Väter Der Geschichtswissenschaft in Japan,” in *Japan-Sammlungen in Museen in Mitteleuropa*, Bonner Zeitschrift Für Japanologie 3 (Bonn, 1981), 31-45.

<sup>2</sup> 1858-1933, cf. Hartmut Walravens, “Oskar Nachod (1858-1933), Japanforscher Und Bibliograph,” *Nachrichten Der OAG*, 2010 2009.[2012]

had to cope with strong opposition as he did pioneering research on Japanese stupas, the role of scientists like Engelbert Kaempfer and Ph. Franz von Siebold and was sent on leave to Japan. There he gave lectures and published articles like *Insularität und Bodenständigkeit des japanischen Volkes*, and certainly sympathized with geopolitical ideas. While supportive of Nazi ideology, he felt so much pressure from the local Nazi representatives that he quit his position as director of the German Research Institute in Kyoto and took an early retirement.<sup>3</sup>

Haushofer had the benefit of being friends with Rudolf Hess (1894-1987) who later rose to become Hitler's deputy. In this capacity, he protected Haushofer's family while Martha was considered one-half Jewish, and the sons one-quarter Jewish. Thus, the son Albrecht (1903-1945) was able to become professor of geography in Berlin and an advisor to Ribbentrop who was later appointed foreign minister.<sup>4</sup> Realizing that Hitler's actions could neither be modified nor otherwise stopped, Albrecht joined the opposition, was arrested after the attempted assassination of Hitler, and executed a few days before the end of the war. While Haushofer enjoyed a highly regarded reputation, he never had any real power in foreign policy during the "Third Reich."

The author then moves on to describe the development of geopolitics and its dissemination especially in Germany and Haushofer's role in it. One important root of geopolitics was social Darwinism popularized in Germany by Ernst Haeckel. It considered the society as an organism, and thus applying Herbert Spencer's slogan "survival of the fittest." Originally a zoologist, the geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hartmut Walravens, "Dokumente Zu Leben Und Wirken von F. M. Trautz," *Japonica Humboldtiana* 15 (2012): 217-250.

<sup>4</sup> Joachim Ribbentrop, 1893-1946 (executed after the Nürnberg Trials), became rich as a distributor of sparkling wine and spirits. He only became interested in politics when Hitler's influence rose, and in 1934 he was appointed foreign policy advisor to Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy. After serving as ambassador to the United Kingdom, from 1936 to 1938, he was appointed foreign minister, a position he held until the German capitulation.

1904) adopted the idea of the state as an organism which has a natural drive to grow and expand; if one followed this view up, the last resort of political efforts might be war since the world did not have much empty space left. The American marine strategist Alfred T. Mahan (especially in his book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*) and the British geographer Halford J. Mackinder were influential regarding the further development of geopolitics. Geographers and other interested parties were trying to identify a definition when Rudolf Kjellén, the Swedish scholar, offered one as “the science of the state as a geographic organism,” which led to deterministic interpretations based on connections with social Darwinism and the theory of *Lebensraum* (living space). The editors of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, founded in 1924 with Haushofer as editor, tried to find a compromise and ended up with a very general statement. There was a strong interest in geopolitics on the side of the National Socialists who found the *Lebensraum* aspect and the underlying revisionist facets appealing and were quick to integrate such elements into their own ideology. In 1932 a new *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Geopolitik* (Working Group on Geopolitics) was established. Kurt Vowinkel, publisher of the *Zeitschrift*, became the manager and formed a link to the circle around Haushofer who had been awarded the first membership in the new organization. Nevertheless, Haushofer remained closer to the *Zeitschrift*, and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* drifted more and more under the National Socialist influence. Efforts to make geopolitics an academic discipline at German universities took place, but did not pan out as geographers and other scholars claimed that geopolitics was not an entirely new field of science, but more of a combination and new constellation of existing disciplines. Thus, only the Berlin Hochschule für Politik established a chair of geopolitics.

The development of geopolitics during the 1930s was characterized by constant complaints, especially from National Socialists, that traditional geopolitics were geodeterministic and neglected the human factor, namely, race. Haushofer and most geographers were not willing to

give in, even though their replies would have offered verbal appeasement. While Haushofer's influence and reputation did not seem to have dissipated, it became noticeable that, as of 1939, when he retired from the University, his advice was less in demand. Also, the war had developed its own dynamics, which situation became obvious when Rudolf Hess flew to England, leaving Haushofer without his protector.

Haushofer's world trip between 1908 and 1910 formed the basis of his foreign policy concept. He recognized the worldwide dimension of the British Empire and the inviolability of a German-Russian-Japanese alliance by sea powers. Consequently, as of 1913 at the latest, Haushofer propagated a cooperation between Berlin, St. Petersburg/Moscow and Tokyo. In the 1920s, he combined, by dint of the *have not* theory, the idea of German recuperation with the anti-colonial movement (only the one in Southeast Asia, however). For a long time, he hoped to integrate India and China. Haushofer was pleased at the problems that the Southeast Asian Union Japan intended to create, under Japanese leadership, for the Western colonial powers. The positive effect he expected from this was more political leeway for Germany. His main goal was to establish Germany as a world power once more, and therefore his support for the *have not* theory was clearly and merely strategic. The development of the relations between Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1941 largely followed Haushofer's ideas. Yet, did Haushofer's views really reach decision makers in Germany and Japan?

Haushofer met Hess for the first time in 1919 and Hitler in 1920. While the two men were imprisoned in Landsberg in 1924, Haushofer visited several times and brought books and issues of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*. It seems that Hitler's early foreign policy ideas and his view of Japan were thus influenced. Until 1933, East Asia did not play any particular role for Hitler. Only after he came to power did he become interested in closer relations with Japan in order to put pressure on the Soviet Union from both sides. Haushofer had the opportunity to exert

some influence through Ribbentrop and his office. He was well known in the area of German-Japanese relations and was visited by Japanese diplomats, military men, and scholars as well as German dignitaries such as ambassadors Herbert v. Dirksen<sup>5</sup> and Eugen Ott.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was probably not without reason that the Japanese government awarded him an order on the first anniversary of the Anti-Komintern Pact.

While Ribbentrop had given up hope to get to an agreement with Britain and became more interested in better relations with the Soviet Union by the beginning of 1938, Hitler followed this line partly after the Munich Agreement. This was not on account of Haushofer's views or advice, but just an interim step in his own political plans. Both Ribbentrop and Haushofer were taken by surprise by the events of 1941, even if they might have had an inkling that cooperation with the Soviet Union might not last.

In spite of the fact that Haushofer's ambivalent attitude towards the Soviet Union was hardly any different from that of the German Army leaders, it still seems enigmatic to some observers. He was mainly focused on German-Japanese cooperation, the axis Berlin - Tokyo. Despite his stout anti-Communist leanings, he pleaded for the inclusion of the Soviet Union in this scheme as a kind of "land bridge" between Japan and Germany as he realized that such a continental block would be unassailable. The Anti-Komintern Pact was not directly in line with the desired alliance, but the problem was theoretically solved by the argument that the pact was a means of warding off international bolshevism and not a hostile act against the Soviet Union. Haushofer did not have a network there as in Japan, and therefore he had to rely on

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<sup>5</sup> 1882-1955; Dirksen "became head of the Eastern Dept. of the Foreign Office and was then appointed ambassador to the Soviet Union; in 1933 he was transferred to Tōkyō where he served for five years. Cf. Gerald Mund, "Herbert von Dirksen (1882-1955). Ein deutscher Diplomat in Kaiserreich, Weimarer Republik und Drittem Reich. Eine Biografie" Dissertation, Berlin, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> 1889-1977, major-general, 1934 military attaché in Tokyo, 1939-1942 German ambassador as successor to Dirksen.

other sources like his friend Oskar von Niedermayer.<sup>7</sup>

Along with medicine, music and law, geography belonged to disciplines in Japan that were most influenced by German concepts. Therefore, the works of Ratzel were known early on in Japan, and even in 1942 Watanuki Isahiko published a short contribution titled *Today's Understanding of Ratzel*, analyzing Ratzel's influence on National Socialism and the German military.<sup>8</sup> Haushofer's works and the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* became more widely known in Japan since around 1925. The dissemination of German geopolitical ideas profited from, among others, Haushofer's military and academic connections, Albrecht Haushofer's trip to Japan in 1937, German institutions in Tokyo, and the Foreign Office in Berlin. Kjellén's books were known as well. However, as Japan belonged to the winners of World War I, there was no geopolitically inspired revanchism as in Germany. Only after the Japanese-Chinese War did geopolitical ideas become more fashionable in certain Japanese circles.

From the viewpoint of foreign policy, the situation of Japan had deteriorated at the beginning of the 1930s on account of Japan's occupation of Manchuria and its withdrawal from the League of Nations. The Sino-Japanese war led to exaggerated patriotism and international isolation as military success was marred by the inability to finish the war by political means. Therefore, more attention was given to German geopolitics, and after the outbreak of the war in Europe, it was assumed that geopolitics and Haushofer's concepts were behind the German army's exploits and the change of National Socialist foreign policy as signaled by the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Haushofer's idea of unifying monsoon countries and the continental block theory were useful to justify Japan's

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<sup>7</sup> 1885-1948, a fellow Bavarian, major-general, geographer of the Drygalski school, unofficial representative of the German army in Moscow until 1932, later professor of military science in Berlin.

<sup>8</sup> Watanuki Isahiko, "Rattsueru no gendai-teki rikai," *Kagaku shichō* 1 (1942): 58-61.

expansion (the so-called *Daitōa kyōeiken* 大東亜共栄圏, the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere) and its alliances with Germany and the Soviet Union.

The author distinguishes between two schools of geopolitics in Japan: The Tokyo and the Kyoto School. As he points out, one cannot really speak of a Tokyo school since its representatives have shown too much of a diversity of viewpoints to be considered a “school.” A certain integration was provided through the Pacific Association (*Taiheiyō kyōkai* 太平洋協会) and the Japanese Association of Geopolitics (*Nihon chiseigaku kyōkai* 日本地政学協会) and their seminars, lectures, and workshops. The former provided translations of some of Haushofer’s works and had good connections among the leadership oligarchy, while the latter disseminated geopolitical ideas among academics and journalists and through its journal *Chiseigaku*.

The Kyoto School was more closely knit and was led by Komaki Saneshige (小牧実繁, 1898-1990) of Kyoto University. Almost all members of the Yoshida Association (Yoshida no Kai, 吉田の会) had studied geography at Kyōto University and were alert to geopolitical ideas. The objective was to build Japan-based geopolitics with a strong orientation towards the future. Projections of future development were in the interest of military forces, and therefore, on a number of occasions, the General Staff asked the Association to work out practical proposals. Besides cooperating with the General Staff, there were also close connections with the Total War Institute (*Sōryokusen kenkyūjo*) and the Imperial War Association (*Kōsenkai*).

The author also analyzes development after World War II in Germany and Japan; he notices similar apologetic tendencies on the side of the geographers who claimed not to have been involved, that there had been good geographers and a few “bad” geopoliticians.<sup>9</sup> Repressing recollections of recent events seems to have been quite common, more so in Japan, where some of the leading figures like Komaki lived until 1990. In the meantime, geopolitics has returned and old taboos seem to be

forgotten.

When trying to fathom Haushofer's ambivalent attitude to National Socialism, it may be important to recall that he never became a member of the Nazi party, but nevertheless attended four national party conventions as a guest of honour. His alleged Geopolitical Institute, with at least one thousand staff that prepared Hitler's military actions, was a figment of war propaganda.

The present work is the first comprehensive study of Haushofer as a pivotal figure in German-Japanese relations and his role as a propagator of geopolitics in both countries. The author worked his way through an enormous amount of material, both published and unpublished, and his research results may, without flattery, be called a work on the subject that stands out. While it clarifies many points and rectifies errors regarding Haushofer's standing and activities in Germany and provides meticulous documentation of all details, the truly new part for the European reader is the in-depth study of Haushofer's reception in Japan. The translation of his publications, the evaluation and adaptation of his theories, and their practical application all provide a wealth of information. Spang's comments and annotations show a very balanced approach and a wide and intimate understanding of his target's historical background. The reader may remain on firm ground and not be confronted with rash conclusions or fanciful speculations. Again, all statements are well documented. The arrangement of the chapters is logical, and a number of "interim conclusions" is given for the reader's convenience. The book makes good reading compared to German scholarly monographs that sometimes indulge in complicated structures and more technical language than necessary, which is not the case here.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Carl Troll, "Die Geographische Wissenschaft in Deutschland in Den Jahren 1933-1945. Eine Kritik Und Rechtfertigung," *Erdkunde* 1 (1947): 3-48. (Published in English: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 1949, 99-137); Kôji Iizuka, "Haushôfa no shinu," *Keizai hyôron* June (1946): 18-25.

From a technical perspective, the book is well printed and bound and forms part of the well established series of the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo.