Delanty argues however that there are counter-currents in the social sciences today, and a revival of interest in the theme of the future. However, this has changed significantly compared to the previous two centuries. Previous ideas about the future are seen as part of the past, not as relevant today. While in the 20th century the common idea of the future was that it was under the control of the present, now the future is being considered as something unknown, beyond our control. Doubts are emerging about the sustainability of what we are trying to achieve. While the future is open and not clearly determined, it is not completely so. This unknown future is a source of anxiety and fear, but also of hope because it "signals possibilities" – it shows that the present is imbued with certain potentials.

In conclusion, Gerard Delanty's book is intended neither to lead to unwarranted optimism nor to paralyzing pessimism. It intends not to present unambiguous truths or simple lessons, showing that even in an age of artificial intelligence the road to knowledge of reality is difficult and tortuous. Reading Delanty's work can become a school of thought for us of the perspectives that must be taken to understand contemporary problems in all their complexity and depth, while also telling us much about ourselves.

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Wolfgang Schwentker: *Geschichte Japans*. München: C. H. Beck 2022, 1050 p., ISBN 978-3-406-75159-2

Wolfgang Schwentker's 1000-pages long *History of Japan*, published by C.H. Beck in 2022, is by any standards a major work, and an English translation is much to be desired. This is, to the best of my knowledge, the most ambitious and exhaustive one-man account of Japanese history from prehistoric to present times in a Western language.

Some specific strengths of the book should be underlined. It integrates the results of archaeological research with those of historiography based on written sources; this enables a narrative that links prehistoric and archaic developments to the better-known trajectory that began with the great sixth- to eight-century transformation. Another major merit is the multifocal approach that combines cultural and political themes with socio-economic ones, most impressively in the chapters on the medieval period with its striking record of proliferating violence, cultural flourishing and economic progress. Particular emphasis is placed on the most interesting change to received views on Japanese history during the last decades, the reassessment of the Tokugawa period (1600–1868, or – in Schwentker's shorter chronology – 1615–1840); here it seems best to quote Schwentker's own summary of the situation at the end of this crucial but long misunderstood developmental phase: "When, after Perry's first visits, numerous merchants and diplomats from the United States and Europe arrived in Japan, they did not encounter a 'sleeping beauty', but a markedly dynamic and differentiated society in the process of questioning the dominant political order from within" (p. 520). The idea of Tokugawa Japan as a case of stagnation reinforced by closure has been abandoned. That said, historians still face the task of explaining the long-term stability of key political institutions and judging the effects of measures taken to limit contact with the outside world, even if the notion of a "closed country" is dismissed as a misleading construct.

Finally, Schwentker's perspective on Japanese history is based on two interpretive keys, one of which is clearly defined at the beginning of the book, whereas the other emerges more implicitly from the narrative developed in successive chapters. The more explicit "leitmotiv" is "the tension-filled relationship between 'the inner' (*uchi*) and 'the outer' (*soto*)" (p. 21). This formulation refers to the Japanese conceptualization of a recurrent historical pattern; the point is, in other words, that the interaction of borrowings from other cultures and the affirmation of native (in more modern terms national) identity has been of particular importance for the Japanese trajectory. Some variations within this pattern are immediately obvious. The two orientations can coexist and intertwine while

retaining a varying degree of polarity, as they did at two crucial junctures: when the consolidation of a central state in the Japanese archipelago went hand in hand with the adoption of Chinese cultural and institutional models, and when partial Westernization was combined with the increasingly nationalistic self-definition of a reconstructed Japanese polity. But there were also epochs and episodes where one orientation or the other was markedly more in evidence. Besides, the same relative weighting did not necessarily prevail across the spectrum of contacts. In relation to China, the political and diplomatic aspects were sometimes more important than the cultural ones, and vice versa. Some further differentiations within the *uchi-soto* framework will be suggested below.

The other key feature, discernible through the course of events and developments traced by Schwentker, is the very close interconnection of state transformations and social change. Not that either side can be credited with ultimate causal primacy; but it is a fact that an early, exceptionally ambitious and culturally charged project of state formation left a legacy of resilient structures as well as problems that could trigger backlash and derailment. The project unfolded in successive waves from the sixth to the eighth century, with culminating episodes in the middle and the last quarter of the seventh. This was a case of path dependency, but that concept is only applicable if we avoid its deterministic versions and stress the spaces of possibilities and chances of counter-moves that emerge during the processes in question. Following Schwentker's narrative, we can distinguish several stages of the dynamics resulting from this initial constellation. The record of the *ritsuryō* state (as historians now label the power structure finalized in the early eighth century) is a story of excessive claims, partial withdrawals and self-defeating maneuvers, all of which contributed to social changes, opaque to the power centre and still puzzling to historians. The long-term redistribution of power and the recomposition of elites led to the rise of warriors with a backland in the provinces but not without connections in court society; the fact that their bid for more power took the form of a counter-state may be seen as a testimony to mimetic rivalry inspired by the pre-existing ultra-presumptuous state, vulnerable to lateral challenges but effectively unassailable at the level of sacral legitimacy. The military counter-state, operating in and to some degree reinforcing a situation of accelerated social change, went through a history of changing centers, power reach and relations to older authority. The first attempt to impose supreme power (the Muromachi Shogunate, established in 1338) was, as things turned out, only a prelude to extreme fragmentation and violent rivalry; but that phase was also a time of significant innovations in many fields, and altogether one of the most interesting periods in Japanese history. It ended with a restored and unified military state; its rulers made an unprecedentedly radical attempt to contain social change through a system of hereditary castes. This restrictive order did not function quite as it was meant to do but was undoubtedly one of the factors that explain the long-term stability of a very intricately constructed political regime. When this last (and paradoxically peaceful) version of the military counter-state collapsed under combined internal and external pressures, its successor was another paradox: a militantly modernizing state with an ostensibly traditionalist anchoring. The imperatives of control and mobilization applied by that state became the main driving forces of social change.

The following comments will move to a more text-related consideration of Schwentker's narrative, with references to highlights of the argument but also with reservations about some problematic aspects and indications of themes that seem under-exposed. It should be noted that the present reviewer approaches the book as an interested outsider, not as a Japanese Studies scholar, and the main concern is with questions of importance for comparative perspectives.

Schwentker's treatment of early Japanese history is appropriately centered on state formation, with due emphasis on its multiple contexts: relations between the Japanese islands and the East Asian mainland (always with the double focus on China and Korea), the internal geopolitics of the archipelago, social differentiation and the development of tribal coalitions

with dominant families. Although the islands were never isolated from continental influences, a phase of predominantly indigenous development can be distinguished from the subsequent one of sustained (though not purely receptive) borrowing of Chinese models, often through Korean intermediaries. The former stage is mainly known through archaeological evidence, some of which is for ideological reasons less accessible than scholars would wish (on the *kofun* graves and their probable implications, see pp. 85–114). The record, such as it is, suggests an emerging political power with strong sacral claims; that is the background to the following phase of accelerated, expansive and culturally transformative process of state formation; but it is very difficult to draw a line between native and imported or externally induced patterns.

Earlier interpretations of Japanese history were often inclined to overstate the role of the mid-seventh century changes known as the *Taika* reform; more recent research has portrayed these state-building measures as part of a more long-term process. Schwentker follows that line and demarcates the process as the "Asuka and Nara period", 592–784 (the label alludes to successive capitals), but with due acknowledgment of two major turning-points: the Taika reform and the no less important reign of Tenmu Tenno (672–686). The impact of Chinese civilization during these two centuries was not a simple one-way transfer. For Japanese state builders, the China connection was a double-edged prospect: a matter of learning from the very strong state re-established by the Sui and Tang dynasties, but also of self-strengthening against a vastly more powerful neighbor; expansion within the still not fully controlled archipelago was part of that effort, and so was a brief venture into continental conflicts, but the latter initiative was abandoned after a disastrous defeat in Korea, so decisively that almost a millennium was to elapse before another continental offensive was attempted. On the cultural level, borrowing from China was compatible with an active recomposition of traditions; Schwentker analyzes the distinctively Japanese way of combining Buddhist and Confucian teachings. But the most original and consequential Japanese input into the cross-cultural framework of state formation was the redefinition of the religio-political nexus: the ruling dynasty was legitimized through a myth of divine origin, not through a Chinese-style mandate of heaven. This was a way of staving off any suggestion of inferiority to the rulers of the culturally overpowering empire.

The claim to divine origin had to be backed up by native religious traditions; the question of their presence and particular features is therefore of major importance. Schwentker discusses the relationship between Buddhism and "Shintō" (his quotation marks; he admits that the term is of later origin) and asks whether they should be seen as complementary or competing religions (p. 140). In light of later developments, it is tempting to suggest a third alternative; they became intertwined religions, more intricately fused than the notion of complementarity would suggest. I think it is fair to say that Schwentker assumes a stronger identity and continuity of Shintō than do the historians who have most recently written on that subject [e.g *Hardacre 2017*; *Breen – Teeuwen 2011*]. In one case, a book title refers to the "assembling" of Shintō [*Andreeva 2017*], thus suggesting a gradual construction rather than a survival of archaic religiosity. There is a further reason for doubting the latter assumption. It is an established fact that Daoism was not officially introduced in Japan, in the way that Buddhism and Confucianism were, and there is a credible record of a Japanese delegation rejecting an offer to that effect, made by a Tang emperor; but recent scholarship has thrown light on multiple local and unauthorized modes of transmission; it has, moreover, been suggested – in my opinion plausibly – that Daoist elements, unacknowledged as such, entered into ritual practices of the kind later identified with Shintō.[1] If that was the case, we should think of the "nativist" self-affirmation that accompanied the alignment with Chinese civilization as at least to some extent dependent on tacit or indirect appropriation of Chinese themes, beliefs and practices. That would be

[1] For further discussion, see *Richey 2015* and *Ooms 2008*.

a particularly interesting twist to the *uchi-soto* polarity.

The reason for elaborating a bit on these issues is that the great sixth- to eighth-century transformation was the most formative episode of Japanese history, and the interpretation of its dynamics and meaning affects the vision of all subsequent epochs. Later sections of the book will be more briefly discussed. Schwentker's chapters on the aristocratic court society of Heian Japan (pp. 217–325) are the most balanced account of this long and important period that I have read; the strengths, weaknesses and vicissitudes of the mature *ritsuryō* state are convincingly explained. The power claimed and exercised at the beginning was extraordinary, but the retreat began early, occurred on many fronts and had unforeseen consequences. The attempt to impose state property of all land proved unviable and soon gave way to various strategies of privatization. Power shifted from the court nobility to its agents in the provinces; the de-militarization of the court, meant to put an end to the conflicts that had plagued it during the previous Nara period, paved the way for a concentration of military power in the provinces. Rival strategies for the delegation of power weakened the court from the inside. The overall result was a strengthening of the *samurai*; in Schwentker's view, they began as a "functional political elite" (p. 333), specialized in the exercise of military power but soon embarking on a quest for more.

The only critical question I want to raise in this context concerns the character of Heian religiosity. Schwentker refers (in a subtitle) to the "coexistence" of Buddhism and native cults; the following text speaks of a "fusion" (*Verschmelzung*) between Buddhism and native divinities, and then goes on to mention imperial decrees designed to strengthen native religion and its links to the dynasty. The fusion thus seems to have been a Buddhist offensive, blocked from complete success. There is some scope for debate on this point. Allan Grapard's formulation in the *Cambridge History of Japan* suggests a more nuanced view: "The cultic realm of Heian society was combinatory, by which is meant that it consisted of intermeshed forms of Esoteric Buddhism, Exoteric Buddhism, Taoism "though not in the institutionalized form, such as was then found in China, and various practices taking place in shrines" [*Grapard 1999: 523*]. The notion of combinatory religiosity differs from those of coexistence or fusion, and I find it persuasive; the fact that Heian rulers tried to keep some ritual apart from others is not a conclusive objection. The religio-political nexus was structured in a way that enabled and motivated them to keep ultimate control of the combination, and this did not contradict the religious pluralism of the dynasty and the court. Buddhist leaders were also highly influential in the capital. A further point to be noted is the inclusion of Daoism – as a fluid imaginary, without a corresponding institution.

There is something to be said for treating the chapters on the rise of the *samurai* (pp. 329–464), on the unification of Japan (pp. 467–503) and on the "pax Tokugawa" (pp. 507–604) as one self-contained narrative. They deal with the formation, temporary fragmentation and successful long-term restoration of the military state, as well as the social and cultural developments that accompanied these political sea changes. Schwentker's view on the first phase is on the side of those who stress the division of power between the court and the new *samurai* centre; a major shift in favour of the latter resulted from a brief conflict in 1221. A noteworthy aspect of Schwentker's view on the following century – the hegemonic phase of the Kamakura shogunate – is that he places a stronger emphasis on the failed Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 than many other historians have done. I find his argument convincing. The Mongol attack was a very serioua challenge; nothing comparable had happened before, and was not to happen again (on an incomparably grander scale) until 1945. The military rulers responded with an impressive but costly mobilization, but the strains thus caused were a major reason for the subsequent weakening of the Kamakura centre.

The sequence of military regimes was briefly interrupted by the abortive imperial restoration of 1333 to 1336 – a spectacular failure with long-term consequences starkly opposed to what was attempted. This episode was an interesting variation on Schwentker's theme of *uchi* and *soto*.

The emperor Go-Daigo was clearly inspired by Chinese Neo-Confucian notions of a strong and uncontested ruler, but in practice, his bid for renewed power turned out to be a futile effort to implement a re-imagined archaic model of Japanese rulership. The result was a return to military rule (the Muromachi shogunate), this time with a direct takeover of the capital. Notwithstanding economic and cultural efflorescence, this political overstretch soon gave way to a phase of progressive fragmentation, culminating in the period known to Japanese historiography as *Sengoku* (warring states), most often dated from 1467 to 1568 (the latter date is then taken to mark the beginning of a unifying process).

There are two comments to be made on Schwentker's treatment of these successive developments. In the first place, the *Sengoku* phase deserves more extensive analysis than it receives, and a stronger emphasis on its significance in Japanese history. This was in fact a relatively brief but consequential transformation of Japan into a state system; a weaker version of that arrangement was later incorporated into the Tokugawa settlement. The rulers of the *Sengoku* domains experimented with diverse techniques of state building; among other things, they introduced legal codes sometimes described as "constitutions", but this is only mentioned in passing (p. 402). The politics and culture of these mini-states represent a kind of historical laboratory.

The other comment concerns Oda Nobunaga, the first key figure in the unifying process. Schwentker's discussion of his career is very short (pp. 471–476) and begins with a reference to recent Japanese work proposing a notably downsized account of Nobunaga's aims and achievements. My impression (admittedly based only on Western scholarship) is that the debate on this matter is more open than Schwentker's sources suggest. The controversial questions have to do with Nobunaga's vision of *tenka* (realm) and of himself as its ruler. Was he trying to outflank the imperial court or seeking a compromise with it? This issue raises the more general problem of divergent and unfinished projects within the unifying process.

Be that as it may, Nobunaga's career came to an abrupt end, and more decisive steps towards unification were taken by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The final settlement began with Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory over a coalition of rivals in 1600 and was completed during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Schwentker's detailed and emphatic interpretation of the Tokugawa period has already been noted, but a few points may be added. In general terms, he stresses the Tokugawa combination of dynamism and stability, but with due regard to the difference between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries; the latter was characterized by growing economic, demographic and social problems. The strategies of Tokugawa rule moved gradually from state building and political engineering to crisis management. The arrangement of relations with the imperial court was durable but potentially ambiguous; headquarters of military rule were kept separate from the imperial court, the emperor was deprived of effective power, but could – in a crisis situation – be activated as a symbol of higher authority, to be turned against the regime in charge. Tokugawa rulers did not impose an orthodoxy; they relied on a controlled ideological pluralism, including intellectual currents that could – under certain circumstances – take more subversive turns than was at first apparent to those in power. The most serious candidate for that role was the "school of national studies" (*kokugaku*); a critical point was reached when its revival of a native legacy could link up with a renewed focus on the emperor and thus respond to challenges, internal and external, with which the Tokugawa regime could no longer cope.

Many historians, Japanese and western, would see the Tokugawa regime as an early phase of Japanese modernity (the present writer agrees). Schwentker prefers a later date, equating the beginnings of modernity with the crisis of Tokugawa rule after 1840. But the events of 1868 were a landmark, notoriously difficult to describe in Western terms. Schwentker's discussion of them (pp. 620–624), presented as an "excursion", is one of the sections where readers might wish for a longer explanation; but the comments seem on the right track, as far as they go. He stresses the untranslatability of the Japanese term *ishin,* used to describe the beginning

of the Meiji era; the restorative character of the change, not just in the sense of a symbolic return to direct imperial rule, but also in regard to parts of the military elite regaining power from which they had been excluded; and he agrees with those who emphasize the key role of lower *samurai*, though with the proviso that this was a very heterogeneous group, and that Marxist attempts to portray it as a kind of stand-in for a not yet active bourgeoisie do not make sense. However, it is – as the following sections of the book make clear – much easier to define the change on the level of state formation than on that of social forces. The Tokugawa mixture of central state and a subordinate state system was replaced by an uncompromisingly centralized nation-state. It is still a matter for debate among historians whether the period most directly dominated by this state – from 1868 to World War I – should primarily be understood in terms of Westernizing transformations or as a breakthrough on the road to a distinctively Japanese version of modernity. Schwentker leans towards the former position (a chapter is titled "The West as a model: Dimensions of cultural modernization"); but as will be seen, he is not at all insensitive to the particular directions taken by Japanese conceptions and constructions of modernity.

This new state soon took an imperialist turn, and that was a development of major importance for all aspects of Japanese modernity; the next step will therefore be a brief look at Schwentker's interpretation of Japanese imperialism. To start with, there is a certain discrepancy between the national and the international context: in the international arena, Japan was a latecomer entering a world that was already to a large extent dominated by a group of Western colonial powers, but on the national side, the imperialist moment came at an early stage of nation-state building. As Schwentker stresses, this was not simply a matter of imperial expansion seen as an essential attribute of modern statehood; the threat of intensified Western expansion in East Asia was highly visible and bound to be perceived as a challenge to the aspiring regional vanguard. The Japanese response was a "state-driven colonialism, for which military interests in security and national prestige were decisive" (p. 696). More economic considerations came later, and so did the development of diverse ways of colonial administration; direct, indirect and informal rule were applied in different cultural and geographical contexts. A particularly noteworthy episode was the construction of a nominally independent state in Manchuria, seen as a space for experiments with economic modernization (pp. 758–762). But the final phase of Japanese imperialism was a "war on many fronts" (pp. 749–788), ending in utter defeat for Japan but with massive consequences on the Asian continent; both the collapse of Western colonialism in South and Southeast Asia and the Communist takeover in China were directly related to this turn of events.

The early imperialist option meant that overseas conquest went hand in hand with industrial and capitalist development, and the interconnection sometimes took a paradoxical turn. Schwentker quotes – with apparent agreement – the work of the economic historian Noguchi Yukio, who argued that "the system of the year 1940", i.e. the measures taken to optimize state control of the war economy, proved beneficial to growth and innovation after the war. Otherwise Schwentker is rather cautious when it comes to questions about the originality and achievements of Japanese capitalism. He does not enter explicitly into the discussion about Chalmers Johnson's concept of the developmental state, but some formulations suggest an agreement on basic points, though not necessarily on all points of detail. The overall pattern of capitalist development is clearly defined: "In Japan, industrial capitalism was not the work of an 'invisible hand'; rather, it was organized from above and orchestrated through fiscal instruments" (p. 717). As for the postwar boom that prompted many observers to speak of a "Japanese miracle", he notes – a Johnson did – the key role of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). His account of the post-boom period is more nuanced than the widespread Western clichés about "lost decades" and a terminal crisis of the Japanese model would suggest. As Schwentker sees it, Japan still has a very strong economy, capable of adjustment and innovation, and remains a major force in

the global economic arena. But he also takes the view that the power bloc of party, bureaucracy and key economic actors is still in place, and that changes made from the 1980s onwards do not amount to a wholesale conversion to "Anglo-Saxon" capitalism.

The destinies of modern Japanese democracy are also intertwined with the imperialist ventures, but in different ways. Schwentker discusses the notion of "Taishō democracy", commonly applied to the period from 1913 to the end of the 1920s, and regards it as valid up to a point. Power shifted from a narrow oligarchy to more broadly based political parties; voting rights were greatly expanded; social movements became much more active than before. The twenties saw the first harbingers of mass democracy. But the limits of these developments are also obvious, not least in the nationalist and imperialist aspirations that often went hand in hand with democratic ones. An organization summing up its program in the slogan "constitutionalism at home, imperialism abroad" is cited as an example (p. 738). Such associations undermined resistance to the authoritarian and militarist forces that were gathering strength at the same time and triumphed in the 1930s. For a decade and a half, the progress of Japanese democracy was reversed. It took defeat and foreign occupation to restart the process. Schwentker agrees with the description of the American occupation as a "revolution from outside", but criticizes interpretations of postwar Japan as simply a product of collusion or convergence between American policies and conservative Japanese forces (pp. 813–816). The process was more complicated; there was, as Schwentker puts it, an American revolution followed by a creeping Japanese reaction; but the former was partly reversed by a change of course due to the beginning of the Cold War, and the latter was troubled by political shifts, splits and realignments. The result was thus something quite different from intentions on either side.

If space permitted, there would be more to say on Schwentker's interpretation of contemporary Japan; but the review will have to end here. It is to be hoped that a distinctive and impressive interpretation of Japanese history has, however briefly, been presented well enough to arouse interest.

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