

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

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Munich: Iudicium, 2013. 288 pp.

ISBN: 978-3862050406 (Paperback)

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doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12773/arwh.2014.2.1.142>

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was a central figure in shaping German geopolitics during the Weimar Republic and National Socialism. Haushofer, a military officer who after the First World War had left the army as Major General, in 1919 began teaching geopolitics in Munich. There he met Rudolf Heß, a student who later became Adolf Hitler's deputy. One of Haushofer's most well-known concepts, which he had developed before the Russian October Revolution, was that of a 'continental block' including Germany, Japan, and Russia. Such an alliance would be able to dominate Eurasia and reduce British and American influence to a minimum. While the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), the Tripartite Pact (1940), and the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact (1941) hinted into that direction, Hitler's eventually disastrous decision to invade the USSR in 1941 contradicted it. Analyzing Haushofer's impact on decision-making in Germany and Japan thus is an important contribution for understanding international relations before and during the Second World War, particularly German-Japanese rapprochement. Christian W. Spang's study, which is based on his dissertation he submitted at the University of Freiburg in 2008, aims to do that in a very comprehensive manner.

The length of the book, more than one thousand pages, nevertheless turns out to be problematic. At times the reader misses the overall argument and feels drowned in details, which even subchapter headings and summaries of the main chapters (often only one or two pages) cannot always prevent. This is especially true since the study not only covers Haushofer's reception in Germany and Japan, but also provides an overview of Haushofer's life and the emergence of German geopolitics. These topics are certainly all connected to each other, but do not necessarily depend on each other. Individual chapter introductions in addition to the overall introduction thus

would have facilitated orientation. Another problematic issue is that the (extremely long) literature review was not completely updated after the dissertation was handed in, as Spang confesses on page 25, fn. 43. More emphasis on current research while leaving out detailed overviews of older studies that sometimes only had a negligible impact on the field would have been desirable. However, this is only a minor deficit since much of the relevant new literature was integrated into the following four main chapters.

The first chapter provides a biographical overview of Haushofer's life, putting emphasis on his stay in Japan in 1909/10 as a military observer. His attempts to gather information on military experience gained during the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05) brought him into contact with a variety of members of the Meiji elite. Spang here also shows that Haushofer spoke some Japanese, but never learned to read it, meaning that he hardly used Japanese sources. While the trip initially had quite limited importance for Haushofer's career, the First World War and Germany's defeat changed that. Haushofer, who had read the works of Rudolf Kjellén (a Swedish geopolitician) during the war, now attempted to spread geopolitical knowledge to rebuild Germany as a great power. The second chapter thus first covers the development of geopolitics in Germany until 1945, which included positioning it among disciplines such as geography and statecraft. Afterwards, Haushofer's concept of the 'continental block' is covered. Spang here argues that Haushofer using the maritime travel route to go to Japan must have been confronted with the naval power of the seaborne British Empire, while his return via Siberia showed him the vastness of the Eurasian continent, but also the possibility to bridge the distance via railroads, meaning that British (or American) naval power could not put much pressure on this 'block'. The third chapter shows that Haushofer had some impact on Hitler, supplying him and Heß with studies while they were imprisoned following the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, and later was involved in the German-Japanese rapprochement, cooperating with National Socialist foreign politician Joachim von Ribbentrop and his staff. As mentioned, Haushofer's ideas nevertheless were never completely implemented by the Nazi elite, illustrating

his limited influence, which was strongly exaggerated by Allied propaganda. The second part of the chapter then explains who was involved in transferring his theories to Japan. Finally, the fourth chapter covers the appropriation of Haushofer's theories, for example the 'unity of the Monsoon countries,' by Japanese geopoliticians. Their geopolitical research primarily served to legitimize Japanese expansion, but also to support the military with advise on campaigns.

Due to the many topics covered by Spang's study it will certainly become a very important reference work on Karl Haushofer. However, a stronger focus on turning a dissertation into a (better legible) book by eliminating structural deficits would not have hurt. Several footnotes referring to wikipedia entries also should have been changed.