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ARTICLE

Performing the New Order: The Tripartite Pact, 1940–1945

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The tripartite pact, concluded by Germany, Italy, and Japan in 1940, sought to create a new global order. This article is part of a broader shift in scholarship, inspired by global and cultural history. Instead of revisiting the decision-making that led to the pact's conclusion, this article explores the pact through the dialectics of culture and power. Through an archive-based interpretation of the pact's signing and the celebrations of its anniversaries from 1941 until 1945 that involved ordinary people in Axis-dominated territories around the world, the central mechanisms of this global fascist alliance become clear. A performative diplomacy of power and unity held the alliance together. Style and substance were not mutually exclusive categories of tripartite politics; instead, 'real' and representational politics shaped each other. The pact was a concerted attempt by the three signatories to transform global political structures and supersede the purported global hegemony of the liberal democracies.

On 27 September 1940, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and Imperial Japan signed the tripartite pact in Berlin. The signatories committed to 'assist one another with all political, economic, and military means when one of the three Contracting Parties is attacked by a power at present not involved in the European war or in the Sino-Japanese conflict'. The pact was a warning to the United States not to enter the wars in Europe and China. But the US government immediately saw the pact as the formal confirmation of Japan's belligerence and so increased its military involvement in the Pacific.[1]

The tripartite pact built on existing treaties, including the military alliance between Italy and Germany, formalized in the 1939 Pact of Steel, and the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern pact, concluded in 1936 and joined by Italy in 1937. Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (the latter country albeit only for twelve days) and then the Independent State of Croatia joined the tripartite pact subsequently, but the three main signatories denied the accessory states equal rank, thereby perpetuating their idea of a strictly hierarchical world order.[2] Nazi Germany's non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in late August 1939 had greatly upset the Japanese government. But as the June 1940 defeat of France by Nazi Germany had demonstrated, the defeat of liberal democracy seemed within reach of the Axis powers.[3]

[1] The text of the pact is reprinted in James William Morley, ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR 1935–1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 298–9; for the German text of the pact, see *Der Angriff*, 28 Sept. 1940; the Italian version is in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 28 Sept. 1940; the Japanese version (in English translation) is in *Japan Chronicle*, 28 Sept. 1940; Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World 1940–1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 123–4.

[2] Daniel Hedinger, *Die Achse Berlin-Rom-Tokio 1919–1946* (Munich: CH Beck, 2021), 11, 309.

[3] Toru Takenaka, 'A Close Country in the Distance: Japanese Images of Germany in the Twentieth Century', in Joanna Miyang Cho, ed., *Transnational Encounters between Germany and East Asia since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2020), 90.

My article demonstrates how the three signatory powers introduced a new aggressive style of global diplomacy heavily focused on mass spectacles of unity and strength. Demonstrations of their political and military power, such as the signing of the tripartite pact, the accession of other countries to the alliance, and gestures such as telegram exchanges between the leaders of the pact's member states, created a potent dynamism and helped to bind the aggressive alliance together. These performances of unity also made the three principal tripartite powers stick to one another until the end of the war in Europe in the spring of 1945. This configuration created a dynamic that made the leaders of the regimes, their peoples, but also those on the enemy side believe in the strength of this global pact of three aggressive-militaristic powers.

In the three countries, resentment over their alleged lack of imperial spaces and their purported national humiliation at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference was widespread. As Daniel Hedinger has argued, the regimes were determined to expand their nations as empires, based on ideas and practices of total mobilisation, racial hierarchies and the dispensation of violence. While not always seeing eye to eye, the regimes were connected through a similar geostrategic agenda: the destruction of the post-war international order adopted at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which provided for the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes by the League of Nations and collective security. The aim was an alternative world order, based on imperial conquest, not only in Europe, but across the world.[4] Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria and Italy's 1935 attack on Ethiopia, frontal attacks on the liberal-internationalist order, had unleashed a new form of imperialism that would bind the tripartite powers together over the course of the decade. Nevertheless, the road to the tripartite pact was not straight forward. Germany and Italy had previously maintained close links with China, but Japan's increasing undermining of the liberal-internationalist order helped raise the possibility for the Italian and German dictatorships to expand their territories.[5]

Idealised images of Japan had become popular among Italian and German audiences since the late nineteenth century. Japan's 1905 defeat of Russia and, in the 1930s, Japan's singlehanded warfare against China received much admiration among the European right. At the same time, Japanese fascination for the purported achievements of Italian fascism and Nazism had emerged as a model for organizing a belligerent mass society intent on imperial expansion.[6]

[4] Daniel Hedinger, '1940. Der Dreimächtepakt zwischen Deutschland, Italien und Japan', in Andreas Fahrmeir, ed., *Deutschland: Globalgeschichte einer Nation* (Munich: CH Beck, 2020), 620–3; Gerhard Krebs, *Japans Deutschlandpolitik 1935–1941. Eine Studie zur Vorgeschichte des Pazifischen Krieges* (Hamburg: OAG, 1984), I, 438–87; work on the New Order includes Mark Mazower, 'Hitler's New Order, 1936–1945', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 7 (1996), 29–53; Monica Fioravanzo, 'Italian Fascism from a Transnational Perspective: The Debate on the New European Order (1930–1945)', in Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 243–63; Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[5] Daniel Hedinger, 'Colonialism and Mass Dictatorship: The Imperial Axis and the Home Front in Japan, Italy and Germany', in Paul Corner and Jie-Hyun Lim, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Mass Dictatorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 35–49; Paul Frey, *Faschistische Fernostpolitik: Italien, China und die Entstehung des weltpolitischen Dreiecks Rom-Berlin-Tokio* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 298–305; on fascist warfare, see Miguel Alonso, Alan Kramer, and Javier Rodrigo, eds., *Fascist Warfare, 1922–1945. Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); see also Gerhard Krebs, 'Germany and Japan, 1937–1945: From the Outbreak of the China War to German Surrender', in Kudō Akira, Tajima Nobuo, and Erich Pauer, eds., *Japan and Germany: Two Latecomers to the Modern World Stage, 1890–1945* (3 vols., Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009), II, 238–61 and Ken Ishida, 'The German-Japanese-Italian Alliance as seen from Fascist Italy', in ibid., 262–301.

[6] For the Russo-Japanese war, see Naoko Shimazu, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory and the Russo-Japanese War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); for general context, see Ricky Law, *Transnational Nazism: Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–26; Reto Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1922–1952* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2015), 1–7; Kelly A. Hammond, *China's Muslims and Japan's Empire: Centering Islam in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 183–220.

In the decades after the 1945 defeat of the tripartite pact, historians typically dismissed the alliance as a charade or as a hollow 'alliance without allies'.[7] The separate Allied trials of major war criminals in Nuremberg and Tokyo – not to mention the lack of similar trials of major Italian war criminals – facilitated such views. Scholarship on the Second World War in Europe and Asia became separated, and the broader global dimension of the tripartite pact was lost.[8] Some recent scholarship, for instance a 2018 book, highlights the shortcomings of the alliance such as the lack of a common military strategy. One scholar, in a 1999 article, writes off the pact as a failure. And of course, it is true that relations among the three main signatories were ambivalent: Japanese political elites had dismissed Italy's 1935 attack on Ethiopia as a manifestation of European imperialism which Japan was seeking to overcome. At the same time, they saw the campaign as an opportunity to dent further the post-1919 international order.[9]

Undoubtedly, there were tensions within the alliance. There was no common military strategy. But these factors did not render the alliance hollow or turn it into a charade. Performative politics held the alliance together and made it look formidable.[10] I argue that a sharp analytical distinction between representational and 'real' politics will not capture the essence of the tripartite pact. Performances, organised with bombast by the three regimes, were integral aspects of the three regimes which aestheticised politics. For Walter Benjamin, writing amid the consolidation of Nazi Germany and Italy's brutal 1935 attack on Ethiopia, this aspect was a central feature of fascism.[11] After decades-long and often polemical debates over whether Japan in the 1930s and 1940s can be labelled as fascist, historians have recently highlighted that fascism in Japan manifested itself culturally – not simply or even first and foremost in directly political expressions. A broader understanding of fascism in its entangled global practice is therefore helpful to capture the essence of the alliance. Through their common aim of a New Order, Japan, Italy and Germany came together in a forward-moving and aggressive alliance which threw the world into the abyss of the Second World War.[12]

This article is part of a broader historiographical shift, inspired by work on global fascism, that stresses the role of the tripartite alliance as an aggressive challenger to the Wilsonian post-1919

[7] Thus the title of the final chapter of Ernst L. Presseisen, *Germany and Japan: A Study in Totalitarian Diplomacy 1933–1941* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), 281–320; Paul W. Schroeder, *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations 1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958), 108–25; Johanna Menzel Meskill, *Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan: The Hollow Diplomatic Alliance* (new edn., New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2012); Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten 1935–1940* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1962), 426–7; Peter Herde, *Italien, Deutschland und der Weg in den Krieg im Pazifik 1941* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), 27; Bernd Martin, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Vom Angriff auf Pearl Harbour bis zur deutschen Kapitulation* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1969), 13; Gerhard Krebs and Bernd Martin, eds., *Formierung und Fall der Achse Berlin-Tōkyō* (Munich: Iudicum, 1994); Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1995), 228–9; for Italy and Japan, see Valdo Ferretti, *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana, 1935–1941* (Rome: Giuffrè, 1983).

[8] Daniel Hedinger, 'A Global Conspiracy? The Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Axis on Trial and its Impact on the Historiography of the Second World War', *Journal of Modern European History*, 14 (2016), 500–21.

[9] Ken Ishida, *Japan, Italy and the Road to the Tripartite Alliance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 159; for the pact as a failure, see Hugo Dobson, 'The Failure of the Tripartite Pact: Familiarity Breeding Contempt between Japan and Germany', *Japan Forum*, 11 (1999), 179–90; Reto Hofmann, 'Imperial Links: The Italian-Ethiopian War and Japanese New Order Thinking, 1935–6', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50 (2015), 215–33.

[10] Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 179.

[11] Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006).

[12] Alan Tansman, ed., *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); see also his *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Gennifer Weisenfeld, ed., *Visual Cultures of Japanese Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Julia Adeney Thomas and Geoff Eley, eds., *Visualizing Fascism: The Twentieth-Century Rise of the Global Right* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); recent takes on global fascism include Tim Jacoby, 'Global Fascism: Geography, Timing, Support and Strategy', *Journal of Global History*, 11 (2016), 451–72; Sven Reichardt, 'Fascism's Stages: Imperial Violence, Entanglement and Processualization', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 82 (2021), 85–107; Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 42–3; 415.

order.[13] In the imperialist Axis New Order, Italy and Germany recognised Japan's domination over Asia, while Japan acknowledged Germany's and Italy's predominant role in Europe and the Mediterranean.[14] The tripartite pact represented a different concept of empire in contradistinction to the ways in which Britain and France had supposedly run their empires. While the Italian, German and Japanese regimes believed in empires that were based on conquest, brutal rule and racial hierarchies, they presented their alliance as an instrument of decolonisation to anti-colonial activists in the hope that such appeals would strengthen the tripartite pact vis-a-vis Britain, the United States and the 'decadent' liberal democracies.[15]

Recent scholarship on global fascism and authoritarianism has highlighted the political-ideological underpinnings of the Axis. Although there is increasing work on Axis collaboration, the mechanisms, methods and strategies through which the three Axis powers maintained their global alliance that lacked a common military strategy vis-a-vis the Allies remain largely unclear. It is at this juncture where the present article intervenes.[16]

As I argue, powerful performances of the tripartite pact became one of the most significant mechanisms to display the aggressive ambitions of the three powers for global domination. Axis propaganda cannot be taken at face value. But the tripartite pact was not a charade. Instead, the three Axis powers invested major efforts into a strong performance which reinforced and strengthened their global alliance. Instead of revisiting the well-known decision-making that led to the pact, I cast the pact into a new light through the underexplored dialectics of culture and power at its heart. I begin with the signing of the pact, a significant performative event in itself, which has received little serious attention so far. I borrow from William Sewell Jr. and clarify the broader significance of the pact as a concerted attempt by the three signatories to transform global political structures, and to create a New Order that would replace the global hegemony claimed by the liberal democracies and their empires.[17]

Blunt categorical distinctions between 'real' and 'symbolic' politics are unhelpful, especially for non-Western contexts such as Japan. In the Japanese case, some of its first imperial ventures during the Meiji period such as the 1874 expedition to Taiwan, officially incorporated into the empire in 1895 after the First Sino-Japanese War, were themselves performative and blurred distinctions between action and representation.[18] Style mirrored and reinforced political substance in a configuration

[13] Among the most recent contributions are Daniel Hedinger and Reto Hofmann, 'Editorial – Axis Empires: Towards a Global History of Fascist Imperialism', *Journal of Global History*, 12 (2017), 161–5; Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen, eds., *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005); Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller, eds., *Der Faschismus in Europa: Wege der Forschung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Wolfgang Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008); Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[14] For a recent narrative, see Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), 2–31.

[15] For the German context, see David Motadel, 'The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire', *American Historical Review*, 124 (2019), 843–77.

[16] Ibid.; Law, *Transnational Nazism*, 1–26; Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect*, 1–7; Reichardt, 'Fascism's Stages', 85–107.

[17] William H. Sewell Jr, 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille', *Theory and Society*, 25 (1996), 841–81; see also Mabel Berezin, 'Events as Templates of Possibility: An Analytical Typology of Political Facts', in Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 613–35; Reto Hofmann, 'The Fascist New-Old Order', *Journal of Global History*, 12 (2017), 166–83; for diplomacy as theatre, see Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (2014), 225–52; for spectacle, see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); see the brief treatment of the signing in Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 308–9 and Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan*, 426–7.

[18] Robert Eskildsen, 'Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 388–418; for context, see also Mizuno Norihito, 'Early Meiji Policies Towards the Ryukyus and the Taiwanese Aboriginal Territories', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43 (2009), 683–739.

where the representative and the substantive stood in a reciprocal relationship with each other. Here were regimes whose exercise of politics and diplomacy relied heavily on mass performances, and it was this convergence of performative politics that united them in their aggressive push for world domination and the creation of a racialised New Order.[19]

Tripartite performative diplomacy built on existing precedents, especially on the meetings between Mussolini and Hitler which, from the late 1930s, became bellicose demonstrations of the fascist-Nazi quest for a New Order, alongside visits of Italian fascist delegations to Japan. The regimes choreographed the meetings as massive popular demonstrations of friendship between the dictators, their peoples and their nations. Whether style or substance mattered more in the making of the Axis is a moot question. Instead, the Axis can be seen as 'social performance' where the boundaries between 'real' politics and propaganda were blurred. A recognition of the performative aspects of the tripartite pact has significant ramifications for our understanding of this global alliance and for how the Axis sought to construct a new world order through diplomatic spectacle.[20]

Diplomats compiled so many sources that were henceforth preserved in the archives, reflecting the political significance of the performative aspects of the tripartite pact. Performances such as the signing of the pact established and reinforced the alliance, both for internal and external audiences. Constant displays of unity and friendship among the three nations, their leaders and their peoples thus created a political momentum that made the alliance look more menacing than it was in reality. Not only officials, but also ordinary people were involved in mass displays of the Axis. Yet the United States, while concerned about the pact, never gave in to the threat posed by the tripartite pact, an anti-Western pact among purportedly 'anti-imperialist' imperialists who felt that they had been mistreated by France, Britain and the United States at the Paris Peace Conference.[21]

This article outlines a cultural history of tripartite diplomacy as carefully stage-managed political theatre and suggests a more complex understanding of the relationship of the Axis. The three states were drawn together by a shared belief in the New Order as much as in a performative style of diplomacy that set them apart from the purportedly outdated secretive diplomacy of the decadent liberal democracies.[22] Ritualized expressions of friendship among the pact's leaders in formulaic telegram exchanges and the annual celebrations of the anniversary of the pact until 1944 were constitutive elements of the pact. In the article's three sections, I will first discuss the signing of the pact. Secondly, I will examine the performances of the New Order and discuss the choreography of tripartite unity and strength. I will specifically ask how the three regimes celebrated the anniversaries of the pact and how they involved the 'masses', including in occupied territories. Thirdly, through analysis of the pact's anniversaries, I will demonstrate that up until 1945, the three regimes maintained this performance, as withdrawing it would have meant the end of the alliance.

[19] Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 152–60; 295; for realpolitik, see John Bew, *Realpolitik: a History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); for the nexus between realpolitik and representational politics, see Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014), 327–8.

[20] Goeschel *Mussolini and Hitler*, 6; Daniel Hedinger, 'The Spectacle of Global Fascism: The Italian Blackshirt Mission to Japan's Asian Empire', *Modern Asian Studies*, 51 (2017), 1999–2034; Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy', in Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90.

[21] For context, see Louise Young, 'When Fascism Met Empire in Japanese-Occupied Manchuria', *Journal of Global History*, 12 (2017), 274–96; Eiichiro Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese America and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan's Borderless Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 2; Sayaka Chatani, *Nation-Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Aristotle Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922–1945* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[22] For diplomacy as theatre, see Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre'; for the convergence of diplomatic styles, see Susanne Schattenberg, 'Diplomatie der Diktatoren: Der Molotov-Ribbentrop Pakt', *Osteuropa*, 59 (2009), H. 7/8, 7–31.

I

The signing of the pact was a triumph for Hitler. While he regarded the Japanese as racially inferior, he admired Japanese military achievements such as the 1905 victory over Russia. He saw an alliance with Japan in strategic terms, or at least that is what he told his entourage in May 1942 when Germany, Japan and Italy dominated large swaths of Europe, East and Southeast Asia and North Africa.[23] Moreover, because of his racist views, he did not agree with Japan's aim to drive European colonial powers from Asia; yet in this case he was prepared to subsume his racist principles to strategic considerations.[24]

The pact's signing in Berlin underlined Germany's preponderant position in the alliance at the time. Despite the fanfare, reactions in the United Kingdom and the United States were cool overall. Joseph C. Grew, the US ambassador to Tokyo, drily stated that the pact 'may be a diplomatic success for Germany', but he could not see how Tokyo would benefit from it.[25] Soon afterwards, in January 1941, the American historian A. Whitney Griswold commented on the pact in *Foreign Affairs*. For him, the pact had been Germany's brainchild. Europe still held the reins over East Asian matters. *The Times*, while warning against the tripartite powers' aggression to conquer living space, judiciously commented that in 'political geometry, the Axis is an unstable figure'.[26]

In reality, matters were more complex. A Nazi propaganda book by Oskar Schneider-Kynast, published weeks after the signing of the pact, highlights the political-performative aspects of the pact. It would be easy to dismiss this book as a 'worthless publication', but it offers important insights into the performative dimension which lay at the heart of the pact.[27] Schneider-Kynast's account begins with the arrival of Italy's foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano in Berlin, days after his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop had returned from negotiations in Rome. Schneider-Kynast interpreted Ciano's journey as a metaphor for the advancement of the Italian-German alliance, as he expected that readers would remember the May 1939 conclusion of the Pact of Steel between Italy and Germany alongside the 1937 and 1938 triumphal encounters between Mussolini and Hitler, choreographed as expressions of Italian-German friendship that ran deeper than usual diplomatic alliances. Despite its obligations under the Pact of Steel, Italy's leadership had hesitated to join the war on Germany's side and only intervened in June 1940. Italy's role in the tripartite pact was not the one Mussolini had envisaged, a 'geopolitical triangle' linking three equal nations. Instead, Italy's role in the negotiations leading up to the pact had been more or less marginal, and it would increasingly appear as Germany's military subordinate.[28]

In Berlin, crowds lined the way from the airport to the Reich Chancellery. Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels complained in his diary that Ciano had arrived with a two-hour delay and had undermined the spectacle. The 'organised enthusiasm' did not escape the attention of

[23] H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–44: His Private Conversations* (2nd edn. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), 488–9; for the reliability of this source, see Mikael Nilsson, 'Hugh Trevor-Roper and the English Editions of Hitler's Table Talk and Testament', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51 (2016), 788–812; for Hitler's views on Japan, see Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 96–9.

[24] Hans-Joachim Bieber, *SS und Samurai: Deutsch-japanische Kulturbeziehungen 1933–1945* (Munich: Iudicum, 2014), 767–8; Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 62.

[25] Grew to Hamilton, 28 Sept. 1940, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, available online at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v01/d696, accessed 16 May 2022.

[26] A. Whitney Griswold, 'European Factors in Far Eastern Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs*, 19 (Jan. 1941), 297–309; *The Times*, 28 Sept. 1940; see also Presseisen, *Germany and Japan*, 269.

[27] Oskar Schneider-Kynast, *Drei Mächte Pakt: Berlin-Rom-Tokio 1940* (Leipzig: Nationale Verlagsgesellschaft W. Conrad & Co, 1940), 27–51; for the 'worthless' verdict, see Presseisen, *Germany and Japan*, 266, n. 40; Frank Iklé, *German-Japanese Relations, 1936–1940* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956); for a survey of Nazi diplomacy, see Marie-Luise Recker, 'Die Außenpolitk des Auswärtigen Amts. Ergebnisse, Probleme und Perspektiven der Forschung', in Johannes Hürter and Michael Mayer, eds., *Das Auswärtige Amt in der NS-Diktatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 79–91.

[28] Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*; Nils Fehlhaber, *Netzwerke der 'Achse Berlin-Rom': Die Zusammenarbeit nationalsozialistischer und faschistischer Führungseliten 1933–1943* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2019); for Italy's role, see Frey, *Faschistische Fernostpolitik*, 303.

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Michele Lanza, a young Italian diplomat. Ciano found the crowds less enthusiastic than on his previous visits to Berlin, as people knew that the war would not be over soon. But crowds, including youths representing the future, were essential cast, as they suggested strong popular acclaim for the alliance. Lanza mentioned another noteworthy detail in his diary: Ciano had arrived from Munich on Hitler's personal plane. This arrangement was a courtesy, but it could also be interpreted as Italian dependence on the more powerful Germany. Goebbels had instructed officials to 'set up this visit on a larger scale, but not [to] close businesses' – unlike during Mussolini's triumphant 1937 visit to Berlin. Germany had been at war for over a year, and the output of factories was needed for the war economy. Goebbels hoped that the signing would be a major stunt 'which would be a heavy blow to Mr Churchill'.[29]

According to popular opinion reports by the SS security service SD, Germans had reacted with surprise to the conclusion of the pact. They saw it as an omen that Germany would win the war soon, as it was now backed by not only one but two allies including the powerful Japan. Yet the US correspondent William L. Shirer, while absent from the signing ceremony, gave a more realistic verdict. In his view, ordinary people thought that the war would not be over soon. Shirer dismissed the ceremony as a 'theatrical performance' that had been put on by the 'fascists of Europe and Asia'.[30]

Other eyewitnesses also emphasised the performative aspects of the pact. Günther Weisenborn, a journalist with links to the communist resistance, covered the ceremony for Greater German Radio. He later remembered: 'There, the arms flew, the heels and phrases clicked, the medals jingled, the laces and stars blinked – a pompous jiff of world domination'. Neither Shirer nor Weisenborn realised that the performance of the signing ceremony would soon create a political momentum.[31]

Because the performative aspects were politically important, German diplomats compiled many documents on the staging of the ceremony. The display of unity was at its heart. Inside the Reich Chancellery, a long marble corridor led to the Great Hall. In the same venue, the Pact of Steel had been signed by Ribbentrop and Ciano in May 1939, as the *New York Times* duly noted. The official German news agency *German News Bureau* (*Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*) boasted that the bombastic room did not need props for 'the event of world historical significance' that would create a 'block of the 250 million'.[32]

The staging of the ceremony was elaborate. Ribbentrop, before his appointment as foreign minister, one of the key architects of the 1936 German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, entered the room with Ciano and the Japanese ambassador Saburo Kurusu. Kurusu, like other Japanese diplomats, was dressed in a morning suit worn by most Japanese and Western diplomats at the time. But Ciano and Ribbentrop wore uniforms, symbols of their dynamic and militaristic style of diplomacy. Upon taking their seats, they each opened a folder, bound in red leather. Flash bulbs popped, and film cameras whirred. After a moment of silence, Ribbentrop rose from his seat and announced that 'the German, Italian and Japanese government[s]' had decided to sign a pact. The delegates then read out the pact in their own languages.[33]

Instead of using French, long the dominant language of diplomacy, the foreign ministers signed an English version of the pact which reinforced their menacing message to the United States. The signing

[29] Schneider-Kynast, *Drei Mächte Pakt*, 27–51; for a report of Ciano's arrival, see Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (=BAB), R 901/58859, report by Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro, 27 Sept. 1940; Léonardo Simoni (d.i. Michele Lanza), *Berlin: Ambassade d'Italie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1947), 201 (27 Sept. 1940); Elke Fröhlich and Jana Richter, eds., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil 1: Aufzeichnungen* (Munich: KG Saur, 1998), VIII, entries for 27 and 28 Sept. 1940 (online edition); Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937–1943*, ed. Renzo De Felice (Milan: Rizzoli, 1980), 466 (27–28 Sept. 1940).

[30] Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945* (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), V, 1619–22; William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934–1941* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 535–7.

[31] Günther Weisenborn, *Memorial* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1948), 25.

[32] BAB, R 901/58859, copy of Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro report of 27 Sept. 1940; *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1940.

[33] For the German version of the pact, see also BAB R 43 II/1416b, Bl. 1–4, copy of *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 28 Nov. 1940; for Kurusu, see Bieber, *SS und Samurai*, 683; for dress and diplomacy, see Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, eds., *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c. 1200–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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of the paper and the blotting of the ink were deliberately slowed down for effect to impress those watching the footage on newsreel. Suddenly, a ceremonial officer in grand uniform knocked a silver stick three times on the floor. Everyone rose. Hitler entered, dressed in a simple grey uniform. Ribbentrop reported the signing of the treaty to Hitler who did not speak. The *New York Times*'s correspondent noted the absence of the diplomatic corps. Instead, the audience consisted almost entirely of German and foreign officials and media correspondents. Two conclusions can be drawn from these arrangements. First is the cinematic aspect, later noted by the German Foreign Ministry's chief interpreter Paul Schmidt, who likened the atmosphere to a film set. Secondly, this choreography in Hitler's Chancellery revealed Germany's predominant role in this relationship at the time, although the German organisers stressed throughout that the signatories were equal partners.[34]

The formulaic language of the key actors is worth examining in further detail. Ribbentrop, in classic antisemitic language, railed against 'the existence of an international conspiracy' which had allegedly caused the war. The 'community of interest of three young, aspiring peoples serving the same social aims', armed with 'the total concentrated power of three peoples over 250 million', would put an end to this Jewish conspiracy. Ribbentrop's remarks reflected the views of leading German pro-Japanese intellectuals such as the constitutional lawyer Otto Kollreutter, who had spent a year in Japan in the late 1930s. He saw Japan as the pioneer of a New Order in East Asia that would put an end to British and American imperialism. Ciano and the Japanese ambassador adopted this rhetoric. Hitler remained silent, as he had ultimate authority over the pact. He simply left after an hour before appearing on the balcony of the Reich Chancellery to receive ovations from the crowds, duly assembled outside as part of the spectacle of unity.[35]

An exchange of telegrams and medals among the leaders of the three powers was meant to deepen their friendship. Hitler's and Mussolini's telegrams suggested that they and their nations were friends. But the exchange between Hitler and the Japanese Emperor was stripped to the bare minimum of politeness, not least because of the lack of personal bonds. Ribbentrop received a Japanese medal. Hitler bestowed a high German distinction upon the Japanese ambassador and the foreign minister.[36]

Messages of the three foreign ministers were broadcast on Italian, German and Japanese radio. The Japanese foreign minister Yosuke Matsuoka, one of the key architects of the tripartite pact, had remained in Tokyo, but his radio message gave him the opportunity to portray the geographically distant Japan as politically close to Italy and Germany.[37] The radio messages also symbolised the worldwide reach of the tripartite pact and projected technological superiority to global radio audiences, even though the messages from the three foreign ministers remained superficial. For instance, in his message to his Japanese and Italian colleagues, Ribbentrop again boasted about the 'friendship and community of interest' of the three countries.[38]

Berlin Rom Tokio, a glossy magazine edited by the Reich foreign ministry to promote the alliance to German and Italian readers, printed a photograph of the signing ceremony with Hitler at the centre. This visual strategy once again highlighted Germany's dominant role in the pact. The declarations of

[34] Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne 1923–45: Erlebnisse des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1968), 498; *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1940.

[35] Schneider-Kynast, *Drei Mächte Pakt*, 27–51; Simoni, *Berlin*, 201; for the speeches, see BAB, R 43II/1416b, Bl. 5–6, copy of *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 27 Sept. 1940; *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1940; for typical Nazi views on the pact, see Karl Rosenfelder, 'Der Krieg um ein neues Asien', *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, 11/128 (Nov. 1940), 643–57; Otto Koellreutter, *Der heutige Staatsaufbau Japans* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1941), 26–7; for Koellreutter and Japan, see Jörg Schmidt, *Otto Koellreutter 1883–1972. Sein Leben, sein Werk, seine Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 126–30.

[36] For the telegrams and awards, see BAB, R 43II/1416b, Bl. 6, copy of *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 27 Sept. 1940; see also Bieber, *SS und Samurai*, 764; for the Italian versions, see *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 29 Sept. 1940.

[37] See the reports in BAB, R 901/58860; for instance *12 Uhr Blatt*, 28 Sept. 1940; for Matsuoka, see John Huizenga, 'Yosuke Matsuoka and the Japanese-German Alliance', in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., *The Diplomats, 1919–1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 615–48.

[38] BAB, R 901/58860, Austausch von Rundfunkbotschaften im Anschluss an die feierliche Unterzeichnung, 27.9.1940; ibid., *Völkischer Beobachter*, 28 Sept. 1940; ibid., *12 Uhr Blatt*, 28 Sept. 1940.

Ribbentrop, Ciano and Matsuoka were printed in their respective languages, illustrating the global remit. Portraits of the foreign ministers were accompanied by portraits of a common German, Italian and Japanese soldier. The menacing message was clear: this pact had enormous military might. It was allegedly stronger than other alliances, as it was supported not only by a bond among the regimes' leaders, but also their peoples.[39] Yet all was not as it seemed. The Italian-Japanese friendship society published a special issue of the journal *Roma-Berlino-Tokyo*. The title jealously suggested that Italy, not Germany, was at the forefront of the alliance.[40]

In Japan, given the rapid signing of the pact amid the radicalisation of domestic and foreign policy which saw the increasing militarisation of society and expansion into Southeast Asia, there were no popular celebrations of the pact in September 1940. Instead, in November 1940, huge celebrations of the 2,600th anniversary of Japanese imperial reign, attended by millions, prominently featured displays of the Axis, for instance a visit of a small Hitler Youth delegation at the Imperial Palace and five congratulatory messages from Hitler. Such powerful displays reinforced the menacing message of the tripartite pact.[41]

II

For Germany, the pact's overall aim was to prevent the United States from entering the war as Britain's ally, as the United States would be facing a conflict on two fronts in the Atlantic and Pacific in the eventuality of war. By neutralizing the United States, ever more likely to enter the war as Britain's ally, Hitler's calculation was to bring an end to the war in Europe. Secret addenda to the pact gave Japan the option to remain neutral in the event of war with the United States. Furthermore, the pact stated that each tripartite state's relationship with the Soviet Union would remain unchanged. For Japan, keen to avoid a clash with the Soviet Union (which would lead to the breaking of the April 1941 Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact), the pact was a clear improvement of relations with Germany that had soured since the 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression treaty. To bring a swift conclusion to the negotiations, Germany had offered to include the Soviet Union in the pact, an idea going back to earlier geopolitical visions of a solid totalitarian continental block against the United States and the United Kingdom. The Soviets declined.[42]

In 1940, Germany was at the vanguard of this alliance, as it had celebrated a number of swift victories and conquered Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. Nonetheless, against Hitler's expectations, the Third Reich had not managed to defeat the United Kingdom. Italy, Nazi Germany's principal co-belligerent since June 1940, had failed to make significant territorial gains in the Mediterranean. Japan was concentrating on the Sino-Japanese war and had invaded French Indochina just days before the signing of the pact. Till summer 1940, hopes among the Nazi leadership were high that a separate peace with the United Kingdom might be possible, and Japanese advances for a pact were rejected. As it dawned on Hitler that the United Kingdom was not going to surrender, the idea of tying Japan into an alliance, while at the same time pursuing a 'continental pact' that included Vichy France and Francoist Spain, seemed the only way for Germany to create sufficient pressure on the United Kingdom.[43]

[39] *Berlin Rom Tokio*, 2 (1940), H. 10.

[40] *Roma-Berlino-Tokyo*, 1 (1940).

[41] Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 310–11; Bieber, *SS und Samurai*, 769; for the anniversary, see Kenneth J. Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[42] Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegführung 1940–1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard und Gräfe, 1965), 204; for the secret additions, see Johanna M. Menzel, 'Der geheime deutsch-japanische Notenaustausch zum Dreimächtepakt', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 5 (1957), 182–93; Meskill Menzel, *Hitler & Japan*, 18; for the Soviet dimension, see Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 69–71.

[43] For Germany's broader strategy, see Andreas Hillgruber, ed., *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler* (2 vols., Frankfurt am Main: Bernard und Graefe, 1967), I, 216; Bernd Martin, 'Die deutsch-japanischen Beziehungen während des Dritten

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For Japan's political and military leadership, a closer alliance with Italy and Germany was desirable at a time when pan-Asian and anti-Western discourses had intensified in Japan. With an alliance with the radical European Axis powers, no longer associated by Japanese elites as 'Western', Japanese domination over Asia could be reached more easily.[44]

Behind a display of unity, tensions and ambiguities remained. Some in positions of military and political authority in Japan saw Germany's swift victories over France and the Netherlands as an opportunity to expand Japan's empire to French and Dutch possessions in Southeast Asia. According to Jeremy Yellen, there was concern among Japanese military and political elites that Germany, celebrating one military victory after another, would develop an appetite for global domination, including in the Southeast-Asian French and Dutch colonies. But this interpretation is debatable, as Japanese officials in positions of authority knew that Germany had no capacity to advance to Southeast Asia. In 1940, the Japanese government had put out its feelers to Germany and Italy because they sensed an opportunity to benefit from the European war by exploiting the weakness of the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. Under the new Prime Minister Prince Konoe Fumimaro, a keen adherent of a Japan-led pan-Asianism, the pact helped Japan to define its own sphere of imperial interest in a new global order.[45]

For Nazi propagandists like Schneider-Kynast, anti-imperialist imperialism was the basis of the pact, a 'lightning that destroyed all English war plans and got under the skin of the war agitators'. Beyond such anti-British sentiment, the pact's objective was to inaugurate a 'new world order' and 'geopolitical triangle' no longer dominated by the decadent liberal democracies and the League of Nations but by a racist 'natural hierarchy of peoples' (*natürlichen Volks-Hierarchie*) in which smaller nations would be protected but not exploited by the stronger ones.[46] In tune with Schmittian spatial thinking and as an authoritarian alternative to the 1823 Monroe Doctrine which had demanded US hegemony over the Americas, the world was to be divided into an imperial grand space (*Großräume*). In these spheres of interest, known variously as *Lebensraum, spazio vitale* or the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, 'spatially foreign' powers would have no right to intervene, with Italian hegemony over the Mediterranean, German domination of continental Europe, and Japanese control over East and Southeast Asia.[47] Karl Megerle, a Nazi propagandist at the Foreign Ministry, even insisted that the pact would usher in a new era in which 'Eurasia' would be liberated from the 'world political marginal territories' (*weltpolitischen Randgebieten*), a swipe at the supposed global domination of the United States and a reference to Nazi ideas to facilitate decolonisation in order to dent Britain's global influence.[48]

Similar themes dominated the reporting of the tripartite pact's conclusion in Japan. Thus, the *Japan Chronicle* assuaged readers' concerns on its cover and promised that the 'military pact with [the] Axis does not mean entry into the European war'.[49] Shiratori Toshio, previously Japan's ambassador to Italy

Reiches' in Manfred Funke, ed., *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte: Materialien zur Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976), 454–70; Presseisen, *Germany and Japan*, 269.

[44] Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 306–7.

[45] Jeremy A. Yellen, 'Into the Tiger's Den: Japan and the Tripartite Act, 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51 (2016), 555–76; see also his *The Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, 25–45; Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 304–7; for the broader context, see Robert Gerwarth, 'The Axis: Germany, Japan and Italy on the Road to War', in Richard J. B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume II: Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21–42; for Konoe's pan-Asianism, see Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15.

[46] Schneider-Kynast, *Drei Mächte Pakt*, 5–7; for context, see; Hofmann, 'The Fascist New-Old Order', 166–83.

[47] Carl Schmitt, 'The *Großraum* Order of International Law with a Ban on Intervention for Spatially Foreign Powers: A Contribution to the Concept of *Reich* in International Law (1939–1941)', in Carl Schmitt, *Writings on War*, ed. Timothy Nunan (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 75–124; for context, see Lothar Gruchmann, *Nationalsozialistische Großraumordnung: Die Konstruktion einer 'deutschen Monroe-Doktrin'* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1962).

[48] Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts Berlin (=PA AA), R 27735, Handakten Megerle, copy of *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 29 Sept. 1940.

[49] *Japan Chronicle*, 28 Sept. 1940; for similar Japanese views, see Bieber, *SS und Samurai*, 766.

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and one of the most aggressive proponents of the idea that Japan should seize the opportunity of war in Europe in order to conquer French and British possessions in South Asia, declared that the tripartite pact's aim was 'to set up a permanent world peace by enabling all the nations to take their proper places under the sun and thereby translating into fact the principle of co-existence and common prosperity among them'.[50] Such formulaic expressions did not commit Japan to concrete military action, but they became part of the repertory of tripartite diplomacy to make the pact look more formidable.

III

Key performative elements of the tripartite pact involved ordinary people, for instance those lining the streets to the Reich Chancellery in 1940, mobilised by the regimes through a mix of coercion and incentives. As in other diplomatic encounters in the age of mass society, they were essential cast in this performance of global unity. In the choreography of fascist diplomacy that had evolved in the late 1930s, and in contrast to what fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had dismissed as the furtive bureaucratic diplomacy of the bygone age of liberal democracy, the presence of the masses suggested close bonds between the nations and their leaders.[51] In tripartite diplomacy, crowds stood not only for the unity between leader and nation, but also for closed ranks between empire and leader. Across the globe, in places under Axis control, the regimes organised celebrations involving ordinary people to mark the conclusion of the pact. For example, in Nazi-occupied Denmark, the signing ceremony was broadcast live on the radio, followed by a reading out of the telegram exchange of the pact members' heads of state, heads of government and their foreign ministers.[52]

In Japanese-occupied China, the authorities celebrated the pact to boost Japanese imperialism and leadership over the peoples of Asia. According to unpublished reports from German consuls in Manchukuo, where Japan had established a repressive 'total empire', the Japanese governor organised a mass rally in Dairen (now Dalian), attended by 40,000 people which culminated in a parade outside the Italian and German consulates. According to the German consul, the Japanese authorities had been impressed by the display of German strength, as the consul had appeared with local Nazi party officials at the various events. Nevertheless, the consul cautioned that not all Japanese settler colonists approved of the tripartite pact. Some, he insisted, needed more 'spiritual mobilisation' (*geistige Mobilisierung*), perhaps because the war in Europe was too distant. Taking Japanese racial supremacy over China for granted, the report remained silent over the question of how the Chinese population of Manchukuo felt about the pact.[53]

Elsewhere in Japanese-dominated China, celebrations of the pact went ahead. Let us consider events in Qingdao (Tsingtao), a former German concession until Japan's occupation (which took place in the wake of the 1914 Siege of Qingdao and led to the internment of the German population by the Japanese). In this city, memories of the Great War in which Germany and Japan had fought on opposite sides cast a shadow over the pact – similar to the underlying conflicts between Italy and Germany, also enemies during the First World War. In Qingdao, the signing of the pact was celebrated by the German consul and a Nazi party representative over a 'one-pot' meal, a typical Nazi ritual in which simple food represented the alleged existence of the 'national community'.[54]

[50] Toshio Shiratori, 'The Three Power Pact and the World of Tomorrow', *Contemporary Japan*, 9 (1940) 1514–21, here 1514.

[51] For the role of crowds in diplomacy, see Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre'; Christian Goeschel, 'Staging Friendship. Mussolini and Hitler in Germany in 1937', *Historical Journal*, 60 (2017), 149–72.

[52] PA AA, R 104919, telegram Renthe-Fink to Foreign Ministry, 28 Sept. 1940.

[53] PA AA, R 104914, German Consulate Dairen to Foreign Ministry, 26 Oct. 1940; for the Nazi party in East Asia, see Donald M. McKale. 'The Nazi Party in the Far East, 1931–45', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), 291–311; see also Nakamura Ayano, 'The Nazi Party and German Colonies in East Asia – *Gleichschaltung* and Localities', in Kudō, Tajima, and Pauer, eds., *Japan and Germany*, III, 431–66; Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 288.

[54] PA AA, R 104914, German Consulate Tsingtao, 11 Nov. 1940; for context, see Heather Jones, 'The German Empire', in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War: 1911–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53–72;

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The regimes articulated the imperialist dimension of tripartite diplomacy in mass spectacles which reflected their totalitarian aspiration to mobilise ordinary people. Stage-managed ceremonies expressed the alliance of the Italian, German and Japanese governments, their officials, and their peoples. In Kirin (now Jilin City), the mayor and the *Kyowakai*, the Japanese 'Self-Improvement Association', a hierarchical mass organisation geared towards mobilising the Chinese population for the Japanese empire, sent a letter to Hitler after the signing of the pact on behalf of the '200,000 citizens'. In the letter, the 'people of Kirin' pledged to complete the 'peaceful unification of the peoples' and to strive towards a 'new order of the world', terms that sounded hollow given the repressive Japanese occupation regime. In Xinjing (now Changchun), the German envoy was disappointed that celebrations had had to be postponed because of the risk of a plague outbreak. Similar reports by German consuls were received from elsewhere in Manchukuo and forwarded to Berlin.[55]

Axis performances kept the alliance going. Just before the pact's first anniversary in September 1941, months after Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, Paul Schmidt, in charge of the German Foreign Ministry's press department, complied a memorandum on how the German media should celebrate the pact's anniversary. Detailed reports were to stress 'the traditional friendship between Germany, Italy and Japan' and gloss over tensions, and not to mention the fact that they were not engaged in a common war.[56]

Celebrations of the pact's anniversaries became a high point in the festive calendar for diplomats and the German, Italian and Japanese publics to maintain the momentum of the tripartite pact. On its first anniversary, in September 1941 during the massive Nazi advance in the genocidal war against the Soviet Union, the Japanese, Italian and German heads of government, Konoe, Mussolini and Hitler, exchanged telegrams whose style and contents had remained formulaic. Key words included the 'New Order'. Konoe, leading a country not at war with Italy's and Germany's chief enemies the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, remained vaguer in his language. The telegrams by the heads of government were accompanied by a telegram exchange of the foreign ministers.[57]

To celebrate the first anniversary of the pact, the German government held a reception at the Adlon Hotel, meeting place of Berlin's high society. A photograph by Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's personal photographer, captures the closed ranks between Ribbentrop, Italy's ambassador Dino Alfieri, both in uniform, and Japan's ambassador Oshima Hiroshi. Ribbentrop, in good form given the German advances on the Eastern front, asked those present, including representatives of new states in the pact's sphere of influence such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, to cheer the heads of states. Alfieri replied with a loud exclamation of 'Hail Victory'.[58]

Italian propaganda struck a similar chord. For instance, in September 1941, the daily *Giornale d'Italia* reported 'great festivities in all of Japan', before railing against the United Kingdom. The heads of the main signatories' governments and their foreign ministers exchanged telegrams, given broad media coverage. In a telegram to Mussolini, part of a broader exchange that kept the alliance going, Hitler insisted that the pact would be 'the basis of the future new order' which would save 'the world from exploitation by alien (*raumfremde*) powers and the lethal danger of Bolshevism'.[59]

Frederick R. Dickinson, 'The Japanese Empire', in ibid., 198–213; Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 15–66; for the underlying conflicts between Italy and Germany, see Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 3.

[55] PA AA, R 104914, German Legation Hsinking to Foreign Ministry, 'Veranstaltung von Feiern anläßlich des Dreimächtepaktes in Mandschukuo', 7 Nov. 1940; ibid., 'Anschluss an den Bericht vom 7. Nov. 1940'; ibid., 'Kundgebung', 2 Nov. 1940; for New Order planning, see Janis Mimura, *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); for the legacies of Manchukuo, see Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[56] BAB, N 2261/2, Aufzeichnung, 24 Sept. 1941.

[57] *VB*, Vienna edition, 28 Sept. 1941.

[58] For the photograph, see Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Fotoarchiv Hoffmann, hoff-42407; for the report, see *VB*, Vienna edition, 28 Sept. 1941.

[59] BAB, R 4902/8822, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 27 Sept. 1941; ibid., Hitler to Mussolini, 27 Sept. 1940.

As other states in the Axis sphere of influence joined the pact, the performance intensified. For instance, the Nazi press gave ample coverage to Croatia's accession to the pact in June 1941, months after the German-led invasion of Yugoslavia following the putsch by Serbian officers of the Yugoslav Army against Prince Regent Paul who had decided to join the pact in March 1941. To create the illusion that Italy and Germany were equal partners on the European side of the pact, the ceremony was held in Venice's Doge Palace in the presence of Ribbentrop, Ciano and the Ustaše leader Ante Pavelić, a radical fascist and antisemite. Here again, the political leaders were surrounded by crowds. The location had not been chosen by chance. According to the Viennese edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Venice represented the 'fates of the Adriatic space of one and a half millennia' and was a powerful symbol of Italy's mission to create a Mediterranean empire.[60]

In November 1941, the performance of New Order unity continued when Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia and the Reorganised National Government of the Republic of China, a Japanese puppet state, joined the Anti-Comintern Pact at the 'Berlin Congress'. The name was reminiscent of the 1878 Berlin Congress on the future political organisation of the Balkans, held in the wake of the Russo-Turkish War, and the 1884–5 Berlin Conference on the imperialist scramble for Africa.[61] While Nazi Germany's European allies such as Italy and friendly nations such as Finland and Spain provided troops and/or volunteers in this crusade, Hitler – unlike Ribbentrop – rejected Japanese military co-operation against the Soviet Union which some, but not all, Japanese officials in positions of authority such as foreign minister Matsuoka had advocated.[62]

With the tripartite pact under its belt, reinforced by the German-Italian promise not to enter into a separate peace with the United States in the eventuality of war, Japan attacked the United States on 7 December 1941. Germany's and Italy's declarations of war against the United States followed suit on 11 December. Mussolini praised the Japanese as heroic in his speech announcing Italy's declaration of war against the United States, while Hitler only mentioned the alliance with Japan in passing in his lengthy Reichstag speech.[63] Little to no coordination of military strategy occurred amongst the signatories, despite the January 1942 military convention that was meant to coordinate operational tactics and strategy and to formalise the division of the globe into German/Italian and Japanese spheres of influence.[64] By early 1942, an Axis victory seemed likely. Germany was at the peak of its military expansion in Europe and Japan increasingly dominated East Asia and large chunks of Southeast Asia.[65]

No Axis victory materialised, given increasing Allied resistance. Yet the tripartite performance continued and was duly noted in Allied countries. In September 1942, on the second anniversary of the pact, Ribbentrop assembled its representatives and diplomats from new member states at the Kaiserhof in Berlin, Hitler's preferred hotel until his 1933 appointment as Reich Chancellor. Ribbentrop subjected his guests to a lengthy speech riddled with personal attacks against Roosevelt and Churchill, allegedly marionettes of a Jewish world conspiracy. Ribbentrop did not mention Stalin, Nazi

[60] *Völkischer Beobachter*, Vienna edition, 16 June 1941, frontpage; for Pavelić and the Ustaše, see the essays in Rory Yeomans, ed., *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015).

[61] BAB, R 8034 II/3720, copy of *Völkischer Beobachter*, 26 Nov. 1941; see also *Berlin Rom Tokio*, 3 (1941), H. 12.

[62] Martin, 'Die deutsch-japanischen Beziehungen', 467.

[63] For Hitler's speech, see Max Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1965), 1793–1811; Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 225–6; for a narrative on the days leading up to Pearl Harbour, see Charlie Laderman and Brendan Simms, *Hitler's American Gamble: Pearl Harbour and the German March to War* (London: Allen Lane, 2021).

[64] 'Militärische Vereinbarung zwischen Deutschland, Italien und Japan vom 18. Jan. 1942', printed in Martin, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 232–3; Reinhard Stumpf, 'Von der Achse Berlin-Rom zum Militärabkommen des Dreierpakts. Die Abfolge der Verträge 1936 bis 1942', in Horst Boog, Werner Rahn, Reinhard Stumpf and Bernd Wegner, eds., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 6. Der globale Krieg. Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1990), 127–43.

[65] Tim Harper and Chris Bayly, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006).

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Germany's arch-enemy, because Japan was not at war with the Soviet Union. The three heads of government again exchanged messages over the radio. Nazi propaganda reported this global news exchange with the usual rhetoric, boasting that the 'huge victories' had proven that the 'aspiring, young nations' had proven their strength.[66] *Yamato*, an Italian glossy magazine produced under the auspices of Pompeo Aloisi, a leading Italian diplomat and president of the Italian Society of Friends of Japan, hit a similar chord in its October 1942 issue. It drew on the familiar antisemitic theme of a Jewish world conspiracy. The 'daring' of the soldiers fighting for the pact, the 'faith of its peoples' and 'the genius of its leaders' would lead to victory against the Western allies whose interests were only material as opposed to Italy, Japan and Germany who were fighting to 'establish human relations based on solidarity [and] to liberate international relations (*la convivenza internazionale*) from the tyranny of gold […]'. By that time, Italy's poor military performance had effectively reduced it to a German vassal state. Boastful declarations on the cover of *Il Popolo d'Italia* about an imminent victory of the tripartite states therefore were little more than fanciful.[67]

Victory rhetoric soon had to be toned down as the Axis, over the course of 1943, proved to be on the losing side in Europe. Massive Soviet victories over Axis troops on the Eastern front were accompanied by increasing Allied mass area bombing of Germany and Italy. Shortly after the July 1943 Allied landing in Sicily Mussolini's Fascist regime, Nazi Germany's principal European ally, had collapsed. In early September, Nazi Germany installed Mussolini as head of the Italian Social Republic, a German satellite state in Northern and Central Italy that was formally independent. Thus, a September 1943 German official diplomatic bulletin, distributed worldwide, insisted that the tripartite powers were 'united for better or worse' and laid the 'foundations of a new order in Europe and East Asia'.[68] The three regimes had little option but to maintain the performance lest they risk losing face and further undermining their military strength vis-a-vis the Allies. Ribbentrop, Mussolini, in his capacity as foreign minister of the Italian Social Republic, and the Japanese foreign minister Mamoru Shigemitsu exchanged their usual messages on the third anniversary of the signing of the pact in September 1943, which were duly noted by Allied sources such as the *New York Times*.[69]

To gloss over the humiliating end of Mussolini's dictatorship, *Rom Berlin Tokio* reproduced a handwritten letter by Mussolini. Writing in German, the Duce promised that Italy would honour the tripartite pact, 'the federation of peoples which has given so much blood and sacrifice to a solemn world order based on justice'. His phrase 'Union of Peoples' (*Bund der Völker*) sounded close enough to *Völkerbund*, the German term for the League of Nations, derided by the three countries that had signed the pact in 1940. The wording confirmed that the pact was the aggressive geopolitical alternative to the League.[70]

Amid impending military disaster in Europe, the tripartite performance of unity appeared increasingly desperate. At that time, some limited German-Japanese military cooperation materialised in the Indian Ocean, the only war zone where the two cooperated in direct battles. A total of fifty-seven German submarines attacked Allied convoys in the Indian Ocean from bases in Southeast Asia. Grandiose plans for conquest on various fronts overwhelmed the Axis powers, who did not coordinate their military campaigns with each other. Notwithstanding the pact, each regime had its own visions for the future.[71]

[66] *VB*, Vienna edition, 28 Sept. 1942; *Ansprache des Reichsministers des Auswärtigen v. Ribbentrop am 27. Sept. 1942 in Berlin* (n.d. [1942]); for a report of the festivities, see *Berlin Rom Tokio*, 3 (1942), H. 10; Martin, 'Die deutsch-japanischen Beziehungen', 469; for coverage, see *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1942.

[67] *Yamato*, 2 (1942), no. 10, 1–2; *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 28 Sept. 1942; Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 206–53.

[68] BAB, R 8034 II/3720, copy of *Deutsche Diplomatische Korrespondenz*, 27 Sept. 1943.

[69] The speeches are reprinted in *Auswärtige Politik*, 11 (1944), H. 1 / 2, 69–74; *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1943.

[70] *Berlin Rom Tokio*, 5 (1943), H. 7.

[71] Rotem Kowner, 'When Economics, Strategy and Racial Ideology Meet: inter-Axis Connections in the Wartime Indian Ocean', *Journal of Global History*, 12 (2017), 228–50; for the lack of Italian-Japanese naval collaboration, see Fabio De Ninno, 'The Italian Navy and Japan, the Indian Ocean, Failed Cooperation, and Tripartite Relations', *War in History*, 27 (2020), 224–48; Gerhard Krebs, 'Der Krieg im Pazifik 1943–1945', in Horst Boog, Gerhard Krebs and Detlef Vogel,

With an Axis victory ever more unlikely, the performance of unity had to continue. For instance, the *Giornale d'Italia* reported on 27 September 1943 'great celebrations all over Japan' and insisted that the pact's objective of a New Order could still be fulfilled if the three countries and their peoples intensified their sacrifices.[72] The three regimes had coordinated their celebrations of the third anniversary and reinforced the message that the tripartite pact sought a racist New Order. In this vein, the *Völkischer Beobachter* warned on 27 September 1943 in typical anti-Bolshevik and antisemitic language that the 'European workers shall be made unemployed through destruction of their workplaces and thereby [be] made wage slaves of Anglo-American-capitalist or Bolshevik interests'.[73]

As the European Axis powers suffered military defeat, Japan, at least until the US offensives of 1944, still seemed to be on the verge of victory in East Asia and Southeast Asia. In early November 1943, Japan held the Greater East Asia conference in Tokyo to show off its victory over Western colonialism and its goal to create a Greater Asia. In this vision, Japan would dominate but at the same time maintain the independence of Asian nations after Japan had freed them from Western imperialism.[74] The conference raised deluded visions of hope among Japan's German allies, on the verge of defeat, and Mussolini's resurrected radical fascist Italian Social Republic. *Berlin Rom Tokio* boasted in its December 1943 issue that 'Greater East Asia takes shape', brought about by Japan's 'unparalleled triumph'.[75]

After the June 1944 Allied landing in Normandy, an Allied victory became ever more likely. The choreographed tripartite friendship had to continue; otherwise, the alliance would have lost its weight. In September 1944, Mussolini agreed to a German request for a special broadcast on the fourth anniversary of the pact. On 24 September, a recording of the Duce's speech was sent to Berlin alongside telegrams addressed to Hitler and Ribbentrop.[76] In the same month, Mussolini, Hitler, and the Japanese Emperor exchanged telegrams on the occasion of the pact's fourth anniversary, assuring each other of the final victory. Their telegrams were published in the Nazi daily *Völkischer Beobachter* under the heading 'unwavering assuredness of victory' *(Unbeirrbare Siegesgewißheit)*. For the *New York Times* such histrionics reflected the 'Axis'[s] desperation'.[77]

These were frantic attempts to keep the momentum of the fractured alliance going at a time when an Axis victory in the war became ever more unlikely. The pact's signatories could not retract from the pact. In December 1944, German diplomats initiated more celebrations, this time of their joint intervention in the war against the United States, using Japanese naval victories in the Philippines as a pretext to boast about the strength of the pact. With a 'final victory' unlikely, German diplomats highlighted the performative aspects of the pact. Accordingly, the 'cultural-political' department of the German foreign ministry suggested a celebration with a speech by Great Admiral Karl Dönitz, leader of the German Navy. Yet, the Japanese ambassador Oshima demanded even greater bombast.[78] Eventually, a telegram by Hitler to the Emperor provided the fanfare requested by the Japanese. Hitler boasted about the 'burning conviction of the justness of our common cause' and the fight 'until the victorious end', as he had no alternative but to continue with this friendship performance to maintain the Axis.[79]

eds., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 7. Das Deutsche Reich in der Defensive. Strategischer Luftkrieg in Europa, Krieg im Westen und in Ostasien 1943–1944/45* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), 643–765, here 673; Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 353.

[72] BAB, R 901/59672, copy of *Giornale d'Italia*, 27 Sept. 1943'.

[73] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 27 Sept. 1943.

[74] For the conference, see Yellen, *The Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, 141–68; for the 1944 US offensives, see Krebs, 'Der Krieg im Pazifik', 691–7.

[75] *Berlin Rom Tokio* (1943), H. 12.

[76] PA AA, R 61405, Telegramm, 23 Sept. 1944; for Mussolini's contribution, see BAB, R 8034 II/3720, copy of *Völkischer Beobachter*, 29 Sept. 1944.

[77] BAB, R 8034 II/3720, copy of *Völkischer Beobachter*, 29 Sept. 1944; *New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1944.

[78] PA AA, R 61405, Durchdruck Gesandter Schleier, 9 Dec. 1944.

[79] PA AA, R 61405, Hitler-Emperor, 10 Dec. 1944; for context, see Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 363.

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Nazi fanaticism to fight until the end was accompanied by stories about Japan as a homogeneous, heroic nation whose tough fighting up to the point of self-sacrifice would be an exemplar for Germans to keep pushing back against the Allies. Such discourses about the heroic fighting spirit of the Japanese went back to the nineteenth century. They were also prevalent in the Italian Social Republic where the radical fascist regime promoted them at a time of declining military fortunes, for instance in a 1944 pamphlet by Guglielmo Scalise, former Italian military attaché in Tokyo.[80]

As the Allies defeated Nazi Germany, followed by the Third Reich's unconditional surrender to the Allies, the tripartite pact ended ignominiously. Since the German government had not given advance warning to their Japanese allies, the Japanese government felt betrayed and suspended the tripartite pact, fighting till surrender in the summer of 1945, almost five years after the conclusion of the pact.[81]

IV

Through its focus on the signing ceremony of the pact and subsequent performances orchestrated by the three regimes, this article has demonstrated that the pact, one of the central manifestations of global fascism, was built as much on performance as it was on a shared expansionist ideology and violence. The public bombast of the signing of the tripartite pact and the subsequent anniversary celebrations reflected a new, aggressive style of diplomacy pioneered by Italy, Germany and Japan that stood in counter–distinction to what was known at the time as the 'new diplomacy' of collective security, public negotiation and liberal internationalism that had emerged at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.[82]

This performance developed a momentum from which none of three powers could retract – without losing their credibility and undermining the alliance which had rested on performances of unity and friendship. Through performances that involved leaders and the masses, the three powers created a strong display of unity and strength. Each regime unleashed and depended on an aggressive dynamism at home and abroad, but three regimes were unable and unwilling to coordinate their military strategy. Therefore, they staged powerful spectacles in order to project unity and strength.[83]

Through the pact, the European war and the Japanese campaigns in East and Southeast Asia became a global conflict. Three revisionist, aggressive regimes which lamented the fact that they had been 'latecomers' to imperialism and that they had been ostracised at the Paris Peace Conference were united in a New Order pact 'for the rebuilding of Europe and the world', as the fascist flagship paper *Il Popolo d'Italia* headlined on its front page in September 1940.[84]

In order to capture the dynamics of the tripartite pact, a treaty that stood for a global new order based on ideas of racial superiority, imperial conquest and genocidal warfare, binary categories such as style versus substance or culture versus power politics need to be rethought. Realpolitik and representational politics were not diametrically opposed notions. Performance was politics, and politics was performance, as this interpretation of the signing of the tripartite pact as a historically constructed event has demonstrated.[85] The violent tripartite quest for global domination failed, but it had cost the lives of millions around the world.

[80] Sarah Panzer, 'The Prussians of the East: Samurai, Bushido, and Japanese Honor in the German Imagination, 1905–1945', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute DC*, 58 (2016), 47–69; see also Bieber, *SS und Samurai*, 20; Guglielmo Scalise, *Giappone Eroico* (Venice: Edizioni popolari, 1944); for Scalise, see Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect*, 93–4.

[81] For a dossier of Japanese reactions, as reported by the British press at the time, see The National Archives Kew, FO 371/46478; see also the report in *New York Times*, 7 May 1945; Pauer, 'The Broken Axis – 8 May 1945 in Japan', in Kudō, Tajima, and Pauer, eds., *Japan and Germany*, III, 530–50.

[82] For the 'new diplomacy', see Arno Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968); for the Paris Peace Conference, see Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World* (London: John Murray, 2001).

[83] Cf. Schroeder, *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations 1941*, 108–25.

[84] *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 29 Sept. 1940.

[85] Sewell Jr, 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures'.

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