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Three Bismarcks of Japan

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the new-born Japanese imperial government devoted itself to establishing unified governmental power as well as a centralized governmental organization. For this purpose the Tennō (Emperor) was transformed into a sovereign of the nation, the administrative system was totally reorganized, and a cabinet system was introduced to carry political leadership; all of these were accomplished after a model of western civilization. Additionally, the constitution was proclaimed in 1889 and the Imperial Diet was opened in the next year. That was the first parliament in the East Asia.
In this whole process Germany played an unignorable role. The following presentation will illustrate some aspects of German influence on the modernization of the Japanese state system. The focus will be set on the three great politicians in this period: Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) and Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922). Each of them deserves to be called a “Bismarck” of Japan. Various questions will be answered: how they came to be named after the great German Chancellor, to what extent they should be so-called and whether it is proper at all for them to be given this title. This paper will consider the political ideas and workings of these three politicians from this perspective.

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1994 Research Assistant, Promotion of Scientific Research
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2001 Associate Professor, Department of Commerce and Economics, Kobe University of Commerce
2004 Associate Professor, School of Business Administration, University of Hyogo
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Awards:

2015: Philipp Franz von Siebold Award
2010: The Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities
2004: Osaragi Jiro Prize for Critical Works
2004: Kadokawa Culture Promotion Foundation Prize