

# “Nationalism” in Japanese History\*

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## I. Types of “Nationalism”

### (1) The Two Meanings of “Nation”

The word “nation” in European languages has a least two meanings, namely, 國民 and 民族 in Chinese characters. The former means a people united as a political community and the latter means an ethnic group.

Thus, the word “nationalism” also has at least two meanings, namely 國民意識(主義) and 民族意識(主義) in Chinese characters. The former is a feeling of belonging or of loyalty to a political community, which I will call “p-nationalism” hereafter. The latter is a feeling of belonging or of loyalty to an ethnic group, which I will call “e-nationalism” hereafter. These two types of nationalism almost completely overlaps when a political community consists of a single ethnic group, which is a rare case in the world. In a multi-ethnic country, the two can contradict each other, as in the USSR today.

The emergence of each of these two types of nationalism is related in modern history, but I think the conceptual distinction between the two is crucial for a fruitful discussion on nationalism.<sup>1)</sup> So, let me

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1) Sometimes Western scholars use the word “nationalism” without making clear which “nationalism” they mean, though, of course, the distinction between the two is well-known.

cf. E.H. Carr, “Nationalism and After”, 1945,

Kenneth R. Minogue, “Nationalism”, 1967,

clarify the differences between the two as a preliminary matter.

When political power is held and wielded only by a limited number of elites and the devotion of the ruled to the state is not expected, any feeling of belonging to the political community is unlikely to spread beyond the class of the power elite. The ruled may have a sense of "our king", but most of them do not have a sense of "our country." The ruled are the subjects, but they do not form a nation 國民. In this situation, the army may consist of foreign mercenaries, as in Prussia under Frederick the Great.<sup>2)</sup>

But, when the devotion of the ruled to the state is demanded, p-nationalism is promoted and will eventually prevail. As is often pointed out, the French Revolution was epoch-making in this sense. "La Nation" became a sacred symbol in France during and after the Revolution.<sup>3)</sup> And simply because a state with the active support of the ruled, that is, a "nation state" with a "national army" can be very powerful militarily, the emergence of p-nationalism in one country forces other countries in the region to promote counter-p-nationalism in their own countries, as was the case in Europe during and after the French Revolution.

The feeling of belonging to an ethnic group can be very, very old, though the lines among groups may be extremely vague and changeable. The Han-Chinese knew very well from olden times that they were different from the Mongols and from the Manchus. However, as long

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Hans Kohn, "Nationalism" in "Dictionary of the History of Ideas", 1968,

Karl W. Deutsch, "Nationalism and Its Alternatives, 1969.

Isaiah Berlin, "Nationalism: A Note on Its Rise in the West and Unforeseen Career", 1977.

Joseph Rothschild, "Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework." 1981.

Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism", 1983.

2) Benedict Anderson, op. cit. (Japanese translation, 1987, p.40)

3) Lynn Hunt, "Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution", 1984, ch. 1.

as political power is held and wielded only by a limited number of elites and an ethnic group is clearly divided into the rulers and the ruled, the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group does not politicize. As a matter of fact, many Han-Chinese served the Mongol and Manchu dynasties, and they were not regarded as "漢奸", or traitors to the Han, by their contemporaries.<sup>4)</sup> Territories in European countries changed as a result of marriage and the succession of kings and queens before the 18th century.

## (2) The Two Kinds of National Pride

You may love your nation, only because you are a member of it. You may support a team from your own country in the Olympic games, only because it is "your" team. It does not matter whether "your" team is better or stronger than the others. In this case, you can heartily accept the fact that foreigners support their own team and not "your" team. By the same token, you may be proud of the culture and language of your ethnic group, only because they are yours. In this case, you do not care whether your culture and language are "superior" to others. As long as they are different from others, it is enough for you. Many ethnic groups in an intergrated EC may be expected to have this kind of pride.

I would call this kind of national pride "pluralistic."

Richard Price, an English philosopher and a supporter of the French Revolution, asserted in his speech on "the love of our country" in November, 1789 something to the effect that "our country" means the community of "our" friends and relatives under the same government and that "we" should love our country passionately but not exclusively.<sup>5)</sup>

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4) Thus, a representative historian on Chinese political thought lamented the absence of "racial" nationalism ("血統"之"種族", "族國之觀念") in traditional China. 蕭公權『中國政治思想史』(1964) p. 72, 536, 578, 606, 637, 701, 844~9.

5) Japanese translation, p. 18.

This is a typical expression of pluristic p-nationalism.

On the other hand, you may be proud of your political community because it is "better" than others in some sense. For instance, many citizens of the USA seem to be proud of their country, because they think its institutions and performance as a "free" country are the best in the world. Probably, in their eyes less-free countries in the world are less worthy of pride. In this case, a universal yardstick of value judgement is presupposed. Thus, I would call this kind of national pride "monistic." Nationalism in the USA may be called monistic p-nationalism.

When one is proud of his/her ethnic group because it is "superior" to others, that is exemplary of monistic e-nationalism. Since belonging to an ethnic group is not usually a matter of choice, this kind of e-nationalism smacks of racism. Ultra-nationalism in Japan before 1945 and Nazism may be called typical monistic e-nationalism.

The following chart shows the relationships among the four types of nationalism that I have tried to distinguish.

	monistic	pluralistic
p-nationalism	USA	Richard Price
e-nationalism	Nazism	EC?

## II. "Nationalism" in Tokugawa Japan(1600~1867)

### (1) "P-Nationalism"

In 1875, Fukuzawa Yukichi(1835~1901), an influential advocate of the introduction of "civilization" from the West wrote that there had been government, but no nation, in Japanese history, because the ruling class and the others had been divided clearly and the ruled had not felt responsible for the independence of their own country. In his

view, if Japan were to go to war with another country, most Japanese would be content to remain spectators without any intention to take up arms.<sup>6)</sup>

Fukuzawa's observation and anxiety indicate that p-nationalism had not yet developed in Japan before the 1870's. Tokugawa Japan was governed by the hereditary class of samurai, 武士, and a commoner could be severely punished if he tried to participate in a political decision-making process. The only thing that was expected of the commoners was meek obedience to their superiors.

However, this does not mean at all that the commoners were ignorant of the existence of the hierarchy constituted by their superiors. They knew very well that the Japanese archipelago was under the rule of the local lords and their high lord, the powerful Tokugawa Shogun (將軍) residing in Edo, today's Tokyo. Maps of Japan, made, printed and sold by townsmen during the Tokugawa period show clearly that they were conscious of the territory of Japan. Also, the fact that the cities and towns in these maps had notes to indicate their distance from Edo proves that they were also very conscious about where the political center was.

In that sense, the residents of the Japanese archipelago were politically integrated in spite of the absence of p-nationalism.

## (2) "E-Nationalism"

During the Tokugawa period, most residents in the Japanese archipelago knew that they were "Japanese." They knew, for instance, that there were Chinese overseas and that the Chinese language was different from theirs. It was a well-known fact that Buddhism came from India and Confucianism came from China. But, since direct contact with foreigners was severely restricted by the Shogun's government, this feeling among the populace of belonging to the Japanese

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6) 福澤諭吉『文明論之概略』、『福澤諭吉全集』第4巻(1959) p.154.

ethnicity did not have much actual political significance.

However, when it came to the development of political thought among intellectuals during the Tokugawa period, e-nationalism played an important role. In a sense, Japanese intellectuals kept on fighting a long, imaginary battle of nationalism with other countries all through the Tokugawa period, without having much contact with them.

For instance, the characteristics of Japan vis-à-vis other countries were often discussed among intellectuals, and several stable images of Japan were formulated. First, it was often said that Japan was a small country (小國) in terms of territory and population. As a matter of fact, an ethnic group of more than 30 million people was not small at all in the world from the 17th to the 19th centuries.<sup>7)</sup> But, since the Japanese tended to compare themselves mainly with China, the image of Japan as a small country was almost inevitable. Naturally, the effort to compensate for this sense of inferiority was continuously made.

The second image of Japan, as a country of (Shintoist) gods (神國), was popular. As some historians have pointed out,<sup>8)</sup> this image was promoted in order to justify Japan's dispelling of Christianity in the 16th and the early 17th centuries. And the word "神國" became a cliché to describe Japan in terms of the dominant religion. This concept did not deny the actual eclectic popular belief in Buddhistic Shintoism or Shintoistic Buddhism. But, apparently the image of "神國" was combined with deep nativistic (e-nationalistic) sentiment. A Shintoist even asserted :

Though Japan is a small country (小國),... it has a superb religion called Shintoism. ... Japan is called "神國" from olden times and it means Japan is superior to and other country.<sup>9)</sup>

7) cf. Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History*, 1978.

8) e.g. 朝尾直弘『鎖國』(1975), 海老澤有道『キリシタンの弾壓と抵抗』(1981).

9) 佐藤直方「中國論集」所引, 『日本思想大系 31, 山崎闇齋學派』(1980) p.424.

The third image of Japan was of a country of military prowess (武國). It was only natural that a nation governed by a military class was regarded that way. An intellectual wrote in a popular book that in Japan military prowess was central and literature was peripheral and that Japan was eternally invincible and the best in the world.<sup>10)</sup>

The fourth image of Japan was of country of rice, which was often regarded as the best food for human beings. This image was based on the fact that rice was the most important product and merchandise in Tokugawa Japan. (This image still lingers on in today's Japan and is stirring special emotional reactions to the USA's demand for opening the rice market to foreign countries.)

The fifth image was that of an insular country (島國, 海國). Until the late 18th century, this meant that the territory of Japan was defended naturally by the surrounding seas. But, as the progress of military technology in the West came to be regarded as a more and more serious threat, the meaning of the seas was reversed. The seas changed from defending walls to channels for invading battleships. From the late 18th century on, some intellectuals suggested introducing Western military technologies in order to confront the West.<sup>11)</sup>

Against the background of these images of Japan, Confucianists had their own problem related to their e-nationalistic feelings. It was Sino-centrism, namely, the Confucian theory for distinguishing 中華, or the center of Civilization, from the peripheral barbarians. Though this was a longstanding question for the "barbarians" surrounding China, it arose as an urgent question in Japan as Confucianism became gradually influential in the Tokugawa period. Was China the center of the world? Was Japan one of the barbarian nations around China?

In contemporary Korea, the ruling scholar-officials considered the

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10) 西川如見『町人叢』, 『日本思想大系 59, 近世町人思想』(1975) p.168.

11) e.g. cf. 林子平『海國兵談』(1791).

Korean dynasty to be the only holder of orthodox Chinese culture and teachings, because mainland China was under the rule of the Manchus, a northern barbarian tribe at that time. They called their country the small center of the world, or “小中華”.<sup>12)</sup> That have been a comfortable interpretation for them. But no Japanese Confucianists had the nerve to call the Tokugawa regime with its illiterate samurai the only holder of orthodox Chinese culture.

Thus, some Confucianists acknowledged that Japan was a barbarian nation, though naturally they were not very popular. Some Confucianists opposed any strict distinctions between center and periphery, asserting the ubiquity of the Way. Some only exhorted cultivating oneself and moralizing the people, saying that what was important was not the name but the actual moral standard of the country.

There were other ways to handle the question. Yamaga Sokô 山鹿素行 dared to call Japan 中朝 or 中國, because Japan had a superior climate, water, soil and people to any other country except China, which was the only peer of Japan. And he read as many Confucian virtues as he could into the ancient Japanese chronologies and boasted that there had indigenously existed the right teachings and the Way in Japan even before the introduction of Confucian classics from China.<sup>13)</sup>

The above-mentioned responses to Sinocentrism were based on the assumption that there was a monistic standard of civilization and morality for all of mankind.

On the other hand, Asami Keisai 淺見綱齋 invented a strange new theory, denying the monistic standard of civilization. He stripped the concept of 中國, the middle kingdom, of any moral, cultural, ethnic and geographical connotations, and said :

The country where one was born and raised is his middle kingdom. Chinese

12) cf. 朴忠錫 『韓國政治思想史』(1982).

13) 山鹿素行 『中朝事實』

sages called China the middle kingdom, because they were Chinese. According to the sage's teaching, we Japanese should call Japan the middle kingdom and China a barbarian country. Every independent country can think this way. In this sense there is no distinction among countries.<sup>14)</sup>

And then, the most influential Confucianist in the Tokugawa period appeared. He was Ogyû Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666~1728), who worked as an adviser for a Shogun. He recognized China as the center of civilization because it was where the ancient sage-kings were born. But, at the same time, he severely criticized all the Confucian schools in China, including Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism (朱子學) and asserted that he had discovered the true meanings of Confucian classics. He wrote a book of detailed new annotations of "The Confucian Analects" (論語), showing off his extensive knowledge of Chinese literature before the Qin Dynasty and his perfect command of classical Chinese. According to him, Zhu Xi misunderstood the true meanings of the classics because of his ignorance of historical changes in language. Thus, according to Sorai, China is where Civilization was born, but Japan is where Civilization was rediscovered and advocated by him. Sorai believed in a monistic civilization, but its center had moved to Japan in a sense. This can be interpreted as another strategy to handle the question of Sinocentrism.<sup>15)</sup>

Ogyû Sorai had a tremendous impact on the intellectual climate of Tokugawa Japan. Most political philosophers, including non-Confucianists, after him were in some way influenced by his thought. According to Sorai, the political and social system under the Tokugawa was in deep trouble, because it was not constructed and governed in accordance with the Way of the ancient sage-kings, which is the only way to realize a peaceful and stable society. Citing numerous examples in his

14) 淺見綱齋「靖獻遺言講義」, 倉本長治編『淺見綱齋集』(1937) pp.195~8.

15) 吉川幸次郎『仁齋・徂徠・宜長』

tory, he proposed to the Shogun the total reconstruction of the system in order to avoid imminent catastrophe in the regime. But the Shogun did not adopt his proposals, with the exception of several minor ones, and Sorai died with serious anxiety about the future.

His books were extremely popular and he had many talented disciples. But, soon after his death, a fact ironic in the eyes of the followers of Sorai's thought became apparent. It was that Tokugawa society continued to be stable and prosperous basically in spite of the master's prophecy. There was no catastrophe in sight. Therefore, some disciples had to admit that peace and stability were achieved without adopting the sage-kings Way in Japan, that is, Japan had basically achieved the final goals of Confucianism without being Confucianized. It was painful concession for Confucianists.

This intellectual situation was shrewdly exploited by nativist thinkers. They emphasized the peacefulness of Japanese society, comparing it with China. They pointed out that Japan was stable and independent at that time while contemporary China was under the rule of northern "barbarians." They called attention to the historical fact that the dynasty of Tenno (天皇) had never been replaced in Japan, while Chinese dynasties had been toppled again and again. According to them, Confucianism was the root of all these evils in China. They asserted that Confucianism had to be completely dispelled from Japan and that if the Japanese were to go back to the authentic Way of Japan, Japan would be an eternal utopia. The core of the Japanese Way was considered to be the reign of Tenno, who was the symbol of Japan's impeccable tradition of independence and stability.

Confucianism was not dispelled from Japan in the late Tokugawa period. In fact, its influence strengthened because of the rise of literacy and other reasons. But, after the vigorous emergence of Nativism (國學), the intellectual climate changed again and it became difficult even for Confucianists to ignore the ethnocentric claims of

Nativists. Thus, the importance of Tenno in the minds of intellectuals became greater and greater. This was a result of the continuous round of shadowboxing by Japanese nationalism with Sinocentrism, as it were, though Tenno himself continued to be powerless politically.

### III. Westernization and Nationalism in Modern Japan(1868~1989)

The so-called Meiji Restoration may have been a kind of nationalistic revolution in a sense. The Tokugawa Shogunate collapsed when it came to be considered incompetent in its handling of "agressive" Western powers.

The shogunate's concessions to foreign demands were regarded not only as the Shogun's shame but also as Japan's shame. A proud country of military prowess under the aegis of gods should not have given into foreign demands so easily. At the same time, a feeling of insecurity, related to the image of "small" and "insular" country intensified. E-nationalism, both monistic and pluralistic, was thus aroused and the expectations of Tenno were stirred up during the crisis. Also, the sense of belonging to one political community was aroused and strengthened among the ruling elite and intellectuals. The symbol of political integration was, of course, Tenno, in place of the Shogun. As a matter of fact, during the last days of the Tokugawa period, Japan came to be called "皇國"(the country of Tenno) as well as "神州"(the country of gods) in political documents.

The new Meiji government, which, of course, had Tenno as its figurehead and had some affinity with Shinto, had to make every effort to introduce Western civilization in order to confront the Western powers. Western civilization meant not only the steam engine and electricity, but also numerous new beliefs and new behavior, including p-nationalism of the populace. As Fukuzawa Yukichi thought,

the "nation" had to be invented. The Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890, which ordered every Japanese to "offer" himself "courageously to the State" in an emergency, and the establishment of Parliament in the same year were steps taken for that purpose. And they seem to have worked effectively.

However, Westernization was often contradictory with e-nationalistic pride. In the 1870's some intellectuals even asserted that a Western language should replace Japanese for the sake of the progress of the country and that Japanese should marry Westerners for the improvement of physical and intellectual quality. Even if Westernization did not go that far, the dilemma of nationalism vis-à-vis Westernization was obvious, as in every other non-Western nation in modern history. The debate on the meaning and the limit of Westernization continued.

The shrewdest way of handling this dilemma was established by Fukuzawa Yukichi.<sup>16)</sup> He accepted the basic assumptions of the idea of progress in the West during the 19th century and believed that mankind was made for civilization, namely, for everlasting progress both in morality and in art and science. He even asserted that its contribution to civilization was the final criterion by which to judge whether a deed was right or wrong.<sup>17)</sup> Therefore, according to him, the differences between Western countries and Japan, except for trivial differences in customs and culture, were nothing but matters of degree in the universal civilization of mankind.

According to this theory, Westernization was not subjugation to the West, but liberation from backwardness. This was an adroit way to make Westernization and scarred e-nationalism compatible. And if one believes in a universal standard of progress for mankind, this was the only rational way. But a universal or monistic yardstick has its problems. For instance, in Fukuzawa's judgment, in comparison with the

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16) 福澤諭吉, 前掲書

17) 同書 第1章.

West, Japan was less backward than China and Korea, because Japan was learning from the West much more quickly than they did. Respect for the West thus combined with disrespect for other Asian countries. As a result, Fukuzawa supported the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 enthusiastically, interpreting it as a just war for the promotion of civilization.<sup>18)</sup> And he died in 1901 with deep satisfaction about Japan's internal "progress" and its increasing influence on East Asian politics.

However, not everybody was satisfied. Though Fukuzawa, who was born in the Tokugawa period could be satisfied with Japan's "progress" in the late 19th century, it was apparent that Japan could not catch up with the West in toto. The deeper one's understanding of Western civilization became during the effort to Westernize, the greater the distance between Japan and the West looked. Some tried harder to become more like Westerners. But some got tired of doing so. Kenneth R. Minogue wrote in his "Nationalism" (1967, London): "The Afro-Asian élite, whatever its original ambitions about westernization, will eventually decide that in the nature of things, Afro-Asians can only be second-class Europeans," and that, obviously, "it would be better to become first-class Afro-Asians." Minogue then concluded, "Such is the psychic history of nationalism."<sup>19)</sup>

This psychic history worked in Japan, too, especially when the Japanese felt that even with their relative success in industrialization, Japan was not treated as an equal by Western nations, as was the case of the new US immigration law of 1924. The notorious ultra-nationalism in Japan during the 1930's and 40's was probably a mixture of resentment and of hidden feelings of inferiority to the West, and an arrogant feeling of superiority to other Asian nations, fueled by the already fulfilled p-nationalism of "皇國", the country of Tenno.

After the devastating defeat in the Second World War, there were

18) e.g. cf. 「日清戦争は文野の戦争なり」(1894. 7. 29), 『福澤諭吉全集』第14巻, pp. 491~2.

19) Kenneth R. Minogue, *op. cit.* p. 87.

changes. The Imperial Army was disbanded and the general conscription was abolished. Sovereignty was shifted from Tenno to the "nation" and the word "皇國" sank into oblivion. And again the universal yardstick of "progress" revived vigorously. Many intellectuals believed and asserted that authentic and complete Westernization had to be realized this time, though Westernization was called modernization (近代化) rather than civilization in this period. "Modernization" meant not just industrialization and democracy. Many intellectuals believed the Japanese had to change from within, liberating themselves from an authoritarian and dependent personality. The "independent individual" was the key concept of these advocates of modernization. Without that kind of individual, they thought, democracy would not survive in Japan and a "feudal" social structure would disturb Japan's real progress in industry and culture. The Japanese started again to Westernize themselves frenetically, believing in the monistic standard of "progress" and "modernity". Perhaps that was the only way of healing shattered national pride.

By the late 1970's it became known to many Japanese that as far as macroeconomic statistics were concerned, Japan had caught up with the West, or finally even surpassed it. This was a new situation for nationalism in Japan as well as in every other non-Western country.

Some Japanese became self-complacent, especially when they believed that Japan's economic development was achieved not just by imitating Westerners but rather by preserving and coming up with original Japanese way as some studies on Japan's "success", including "Japanese management", pointed out. Their e-nationalistic pride was expressed in various occasions. This was the background of the ill-famed emergence of "new nationalism". (新國家主義) and "Yamatoism" in the 1980's. Though these "isms" were names of emotional and intellectual tendencies rather than systematic philosophies, their emergence had strik-

ing similarities with that of Nativism in the 18th century when the assertion of Ogyū Sorai on the necessity of reconstruction of Japanese regime after the model of an idealized foreign way lost its persuasiveness because of continuing "peace" and "prosperity."

But unlike Nativism in the Tokugawa period, this new nativism had grave obstacles to prevalence from the beginning. At the present stage of global economic development, a "successful" economy is not the achievement of one country, but a result of complicated interpenetration of multiple economies. Especially, a resourceless country such as Japan has no choice but to depend on favorable international relationships for continuous "prosperity." Therefore, new nativists had to be internationalistic to some extent willingly or unwillingly at the same time, so long as they had some reason, as the policies of the ruling conservative party have been indicating. This is nationalistic internationalism, as it were.

On the other hand, some people still believe in the need of "progress" especially in politics, social relationships and ways of thinking. They believe in the universality of values which modern Europe have cherished and call for the abolishment of Japan's peculiarities that contradict them. In that sense, they are internationalists with monistic or universalistic motives.

These are reasons why "internationalization" (國際化) has become a watchword for virtually every political parties and intellectuals in the 1980's.

I do not dare to predict, as a conclusion, the future of Japanese nationalism. But obviously, nationalism, especially e-nationalism will not die out in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, rapid simultaneous of globalization, supranationalization, transnationalization, regionalization and localization, which is caused by tremendous degree of interpenetration of people, information, merchandise and pollution may

relativize further the importance of things national even in Japan. It may be possible, if not probable, that many Japanese in the next century will “think globally and act locally” (a popular motto in the USA)<sup>20)</sup> rather than “nationally.”

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20) 『朝日新聞』1989.11.22. p.11.