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KEVIN M. DOAK

Ethnic Nationalism and Romanticism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan

In recent years, studies on nationalism have benefited from a variety of new approaches that have called attention to the subtle and complex ways nationalism has historically interwoven issues of state structure, culture, and ethnic identity. Hobsbawm and Ranger uncovered the artificial nature of national identities, revealing how the nation is constructed and contested in a variety of forms.¹ Benedict Anderson went even further to show not only that the state was able to mobilize its resources to construct an imaginary community around itself, but that others did avail themselves of the same basic procedures to construct alternative forms of nationalism at the popular level which then often were regarded as a threat by the state.² Anderson's work suggested a more complex approach to the issue of nationalism by revealing how ambiguous and polysemic nationalism was, particularly for late-developing societies in Asia, and it called for more attention to the uneasy relationship between what he called popular and official forms of nationalism. And John Breuilly has presented a sweeping analysis of nationalism in the modern world that demonstrates conclusively how nationalism has often served historically as an ideology of cultural identity mobilized against the state.³

But contributions to the understanding of nationalism have come not only from English-language theorists. Tōyama Shigeki has been at the forefront of Japanese scholars of nationalism, writing for over half a century on nationalism both as a general theoretical problem and in the specific context of Japanese history. Reflecting on the course of Japanese history since the

1. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), esp. pp. 80–128.

3. John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982; second ed., University of Chicago Press, 1994).

encounter with the West in the 1850s, Tōyama has argued that nationalism in Japan has carried with it two distinct strains: a “reactionary nationalism” (*handōteki nashonarizumu*) identified with the capitalist state, and a “progressive nationalism” (*shinpoteki nashonarizumu*) that embodied more populist aspirations.⁴ These two forms of nationalism arose from the social mechanisms that shaped Japan’s historical encounter with the West. Tōyama argues that since peasant rebellions in late Tokugawa Japan were focused inward against Japan’s own social elite, rather than outside against the foreign threat, Japanese political elites were able to transfer the potential oppression from “outside” to repression of the Japanese people from “above” with considerable ease.⁵ Political opposition to this state nationalism collapsed, Tōyama concludes, with the end of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement around 1890, when public elections were first held under the new constitution. Thereafter, alternative, more populist concepts of nation and national identity became the province of literature, especially for those intellectuals who were attracted to romanticism.⁶

While Tōyama makes explicit the relationship between reactionary nationalism and progressive nationalism, these categories remained flexible, indeed ambiguous, enough to incorporate whatever movements seemed to him to promote the interests of the “people,” very broadly conceived.⁷ Consequently, a first step in reconsidering Japanese nationalism would be to effect a more precise understanding of what these different forms of nation-

4. Tōyama Shigeki, “Futatsu no nashonarizumu no taikō: sono rekishiteki kōsatsu,” in *Tōyama Shigeki chosakushū*, Vol. 5: *Meiji no shisō to nashonarizumu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), p. 213. Here, it should be noted, Tōyama was simply applying Lenin’s theory on nationalism (i.e., that there was a good nationalism [“oppressed-nation nationalism”] as well as a bad nationalism [“oppressor-nation nationalism”]) to Japan. On Lenin’s theory of nationalism and Stalin’s contribution to it, see Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communist Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 414–52.

5. Tōyama, “Futatsu no nashonarizumu no taikō,” p. 216.

6. Tōyama, “Kindai bungaku keisei no rekishiteki zentei: bungaku to seiji no mondai,” *Bungaku*, Vol. 17, No. 10 (October 1949). Reprinted in *Tōyama Shigeki chosakushū*, Vol. 5; see pp. 198–200. See also Carol Gluck’s conclusion that the process of national definition (in the sense of the nation-state or *kokka/kokumin*) was largely completed by 1890 in her *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), especially pp. 17–26.

7. Tōyama candidly admits that his understanding of two types of nationalism is superimposed by the experience of the polarities of postwar Japan in the Cold War. His “two kinds of nationalism” are essentially “capitalist nationalism” (reactionary) and “Marxist nationalism” (progressive), an argument that seems less persuasive now that Marxism generally has come to new terms with ethnic nationalism since the collapse of Stalin’s attempt to control ethnic nationalism within a soviet political structure. Moreover, Tōyama’s argument that nationalism is merely a tool of other political interests, while remaining faithful to Stalin’s interpretation, elevates nationalism beyond the pale of history by denying it any historical content of its own, while seriously underestimating its powerful appeal as nationalism.

alism meant and, simultaneously, to reveal how imaginative acts of identity production operated at various social levels to construct contesting forms of national identities.

Most studies of Japanese nationalism have focused on what Anderson has called "official nationalism," or what I will call below "state nationalism" (*kokkashugi*).⁸ Few have developed the distinction between a political nationalism centered on a transcendental state and an ethnic nationalism conceived in opposition to it.⁹ Several studies discuss cultural issues, particularly Carol Gluck's social and cultural approach to Meiji nationalism, but none fundamentally disagrees with Kenneth Pyle's definition of nationalism as "a process . . . by which large numbers of people of all social classes are psychologically integrated into active membership in and positive identification with the nation-state."¹⁰ The state remained at the core of social identity, and culture only served to mediate the relationship between individual subjects and the state. In the end, such approaches have provided compelling evidence for the preeminence of the power of the state over the rights of the individual citizen in Japan, but little in the way of an explanation for the compelling attraction of nationalism for many Japanese people.

What has been lacking is an approach to the problem of nationalism in Japan that helps to explain how so many Japanese people could have been attracted to nationalism in the early twentieth century, given several previous decades of heavy statist intervention in their lives. Statist education certainly succeeded in encouraging many to identify with the modern state and its military exploits. But neither statism nor militarism can be completely

8. Examples are legion, but would have to include: Delmer Brown, *Nationalism in Japan: An Introductory Historical Analysis* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1955), a work that begins its focus well before the modern period but sees early Japanese history leading inexorably toward the state nationalism of the Meiji period; Ivan Morris, *Nationalism and the Right Wing in Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Byron K. Marshall, *Capitalism and Nationalism in Prewar Japan: The Ideology of the Business Elite, 1868–1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); George M. Wilson, *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*; and Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems in Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) and *The Japanese Question: Power and Purpose in a New Age* (Washington: AEI Press, 1992).

9. A recent exception is Germaine Hoston's *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) which recognizes the theoretical distinction between the nation as "ethnos" and the state, but eventually agrees with Ishida Takeshi's conclusion (cited below) that no meaningful distinction between ethnic nation and state emerged in prewar Japan.

10. Kenneth B. Pyle, "Introduction: Some Recent Approaches to Japanese Nationalism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (November 1971), p. 6. There are some suggestive reflections on the term "minzoku" scattered throughout Andrew Barshay's insightful *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), especially pp. 106, 218–19.

equated with nationalism. Many patriotic and nationalistic Japanese were not militarists, and some nationalists were even critical of the state.¹¹ And for some Japanese who were less than enamored with the military, the modern Japanese state, wrapped in Western constitutional theories and parliamentary structures, seemed to hold a dubious claim on Japanese cultural identity. To these cultural nationalists, the modern state seemed less legitimate as an expression of national culture the more it relied on Western cultural forms. In order to grasp why the solution to this modern paradox that the “new generation” of Meiji youth had devised in the late nineteenth century was no longer working 30 years later, we need to expand our understanding of what nationalism is and what kinds of relationships nationalism has had historically with the state.

Walker Connor has contributed greatly to clarifying the relationship of nationalism to the state by demonstrating that, historically, the nation has been much more closely associated with ethnicity than with loyalty to the state. The terminological confusion of nation with state is a recent development and one Connor shows derives in part from postwar American scholarship that reflected the United States’ own experience as a transnational, or multinational, state. It also derives, significantly for scholars of Japan, from a heavy emphasis in theories of nationalism on Japan and Germany during the wartime when a more perfect union of nation and state occurred in the form of the militarist nation-state.¹² In order to clarify this fundamental nature of nationalism as loyalty to one’s ethnic group, Connor has emphasized the term “ethnonationalism” in his writings.

11. One famous example of a patriot who was not a militarist is Dietmember Saitō Takao, whose 1936 speech on the purge of military activists and 1940 speech on the handling of the “China Incident” led to his ouster from the Diet and to a widespread conclusion in the postwar years that he was a “progressive.” But Saitō’s writings do not bear this out, and Yoshimi Yoshiaki has revealed that Saitō was merely expressing the belief of many ordinary Japanese that the military had strayed from the pursuit of national interests in Asia. See Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Kusa no ne no fuashizumu* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1987), pp. 3–21. While Saitō was indeed a statist, if not a militarist, the focus of this paper is, of course, on those who sought to assert a distinction between nationalism, on the one hand, and patriotism and militarism, on the other hand, as emblems of the modern state.

12. Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 95–100. The emphasis on Germany in studies on Japanese nationalism also seems to have led Ishida Takeshi to conclude that Japan was different from Germany in his (mistaken) belief that Japan, unlike Germany, had no history of a clear conceptual distinction between *minzoku* (Volk) and *kokka* (Staat). See his *Nihon no seiji to kotoba*, Vol. 2: “*Heiwa*” to “*kokka*” (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1989), p. 208. Ishida’s views on the subject seem to have had a tremendous influence in the field and are reproduced in Germaine Hoston’s *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), especially her citation from a former Marxist, Kobayashi Morito, who argued that in Japan “*minzoku* (nation or ethnic people) and *kokka* (the state) were one” (p. 32).

Connor's telling assessment of scholarship on Japanese nationalism is correct: there has been an underlying assumption that national loyalty in Japan has always centered on the state. Those who have sought to contest this form of nationalism have often pointed to subgroups that seem ethnically distinct from an equally pure "Yamato" race to suggest the existence, however marginal, of other ethnic groups within the Japanese state.¹³ Without denying the existence of ethnic minorities in Japan, it is also true that such approaches have derived their models of "ethnicity" from the same body of postwar, and largely American, scholarship that Connor identified. It is important to recognize that the association of *minzoku* with "ethnic minorities" in Japan is a rather recent development. Marxist scholarship in the immediate postwar years shared with prewar nationalists an interpretation of *minzoku* as referring to a Japanese nation distinct from the modern Japanese state.¹⁴ The actual existence of multiple and large ethnic groups within the modern state has not been necessary for the mobilization of a discourse on ethnic nationalism in Japan.

In the remaining pages, I hope to show how ethnicity, never to be taken for granted as a natural form of identity, was at the heart of the struggle over how to represent the Japanese people and, consequently, the nation itself. Ethnic nationalism began to take on a new significance in Japan after the turn of the century, just as the concept of the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) entered Japanese political discourse.¹⁵ I will begin with a brief overview of

13. See, for example, Yazawa Kōsuke, "Ta-minzoku shakai to shite no Nihon," in Reki-shigaki Kenkyūkai and Nihonshi Kenkyūkai, eds., *Kōza Nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankei, 1985), Vol. 13, pp. 25–47; see also the essays in Arano Yasunori et al., eds., *Ajia no naka no Nihonshi*, Vol. 4: *Chiiku to etonosu (minzoku)* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1992), especially Kikuchi Isao, "Kyōkai to etonozu (minzoku)," pp. 55–80.

14. See, for example, Tōyama Shigeki, "Futatsu no nashonarizumu," *Chūō kōron*, June 1951; Inoue Kiyoshi, "Nihon minzoku keisei to Meiji Ishin no igi," in *Nihon gendaishi* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1951), Vol. 1; Eguchi Bokurō, "Nihon ni okeru minzokuteki na mono," *Chūō kōron*, April 1952. Inoue's essay is particularly helpful: he offers an extended footnote that demonstrates that *minzoku* is best translated into English as "nation," not as "race." All three essays were reprinted in Bandō Hiroshi, ed., *Minzoku no mondai: rekishi kagaku taikei*, Vol. 15 (Tokyo: Rekishi Kagaku Kyōgikai, 1976). This work (which ought to be required reading on the subject of nationalism in Japan) also includes two essays from the prewar Marxist appraisal of *minzoku* by Matsubara Hiroshi and Hayakawa Jirō, both of whom explicitly identified *minzoku* with the English word "nation."

15. The word "minzoku" was not completely unknown in Japan prior to the twentieth century, and one of the earliest uses appears to have been Miyazaki Muryū's in "minzoku kaigi" to translate the French "Assemblée Nationale" in his adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's *Ange Pitou*, "Furansu kakumeiki: jiyū no kachidoki," that appeared in the *Jiyū shinbun* from August 12, 1882 to February 8, 1883 (cited in Yasuda Hiroshi, "Kindai Nihon ni okeru 'minzoku' kannen no keisei," *Shisō to gendai*, Vol. 31 (September 1992), p. 62). But Yasuda adds that the specific use of "minzoku" to mean nation, as distinct from the nation defined as "kokumin," dates from no earlier than the 1890s (*ibid.*, p. 66), while Yun Kon-cha argues that the

how ethnicity and nationalism evolved in the political discourse of early twentieth-century Japan, but focus mainly on the 1930s, for it was during that decade that ethnic nationalism reemerged as an especially pressing issue. As Tōyama noted, nationalism was taken up by a group of critics and literary figures, many of whom had been exposed to Marxist and proletarian writings before turning to romanticism in their attempt to develop a new form of cultural production that could represent ethnic identity in ways they initially hoped would not be coopted by state nationalism. Whether they were successful (and, as I argue below, they were not), they did highlight the complex relationship between ethnicity, culture, and the state by insisting on the possibility of a creative approach to the problem of nationalism through an emphasis on producing collective forms of identity that were not immediately reducible to the state. And in the process, they sketched out the contours of an ethnic nationalism that would survive the collapse of the wartime state to remain a problem today, especially as increasing numbers of Japanese seek a closer relationship with their Asian neighbors.

Ethnic Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Japan

The rise of ethnic nationalism in Japan needs to be understood within the context of a series of historical and political developments during the early twentieth century that began to challenge previous understandings of the relationship between national identity and state development, as well as the role of the West in Asia. Early cultural nationalists in Meiji Japan, such as Miyake Setsurei and Shiga Shigetaka, had also emphasized the particularity of Japanese culture, but they located this need for cultural appreciation within the larger paradigm of state-building and saw cultural nationalism as ideally strengthening the state.¹⁶ In the early years of the twentieth century, as Japan prepared for war against Russia, ethnic nationalism (*minzokushugi*) began to appear in powerful if still inchoate form. One of the earliest nationalist groups to appeal to ethnicity in twentieth-century Japan was the Amur River Society (Kokuryūkai). Founded in 1901 by Uchida Ryōhei, the Society announced, as one of its guiding principles, the encouragement of “the Asian ethnic nations” (*Ajia minzoku*) and their resistance to legalism, which they felt had restricted the people’s freedom.¹⁷ Yet, in spite of the potential for this critique of “legalism” to encompass a critique of the modern Japa-

consciousness of “minzoku” was not fully established in modern Japan until the turn of the century. See his “Minzoku gensō no satetsu: ‘Nihon minzoku’ to iu jiko teiji,” *Shisō*, No. 834 (December 1993), p. 17.

16. Yun Kon-cha has pointed out that the use of “Yamato minzoku” by Shiga Shigetaka was an attempt to restructure the “nucleus of the state” (*kokka no shutai*) on the foundations of ancient Japanese history, tradition, and culture. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

17. Ino Kenji, “Uyoku minzoku-ha undō o tenbō suru,” in Ino Kenji, ed., *Uyoku minzoku-ha sōran* (Tokyo: Nijūisseki Shoin, 1990), pp. 72–73.

nese state, the Amur River Society worked closely with the military in various forms of “continental adventuring,” thereby undermining any incipient sense of a tension between the ethnic nation and the Japanese state.

Subsequent developments in the discourse on ethnic nationalism in Japan came from two general directions: changes in Marxist theory concerning the role of nationalism in the global proletariat movement, and rising popular movements against the Japanese state after the disappointing terms of the Portsmouth treaty that concluded the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. Shumpei Okamoto has demonstrated that the Hibiya riot, which broke out in September 1905 after the modest terms of the Portsmouth treaty became known, was closely related to a rising sense of alienation between “the people,” broadly conceived, and the Japanese state.¹⁸

While nationalists and others in Japan groped for the means to account for this new political force, socialists from around the world gathered at the fifth general meeting of the Second International in Stuttgart in 1907 to debate whether nationalism was an appropriate response to imperialist wars. Although the debate ended in a deadlock, largely over differences in the ways socialists from wealthy countries and those from developing countries appraised nationalism, the issues of colonization and nationalism it raised received a warm reception in Asia, where hopes had been stirred by Japan's victory against Russia.¹⁹ At the same time, Stalin's definition of ethnic nationalism as a social and historical category in his 1913 “Marxism and the National and Colonial Question” (translated into Japanese as “Marukusu-shugi to minzoku mondai”) provided a stronger identification of the *ethnos* (*minzoku*) with nation, distinct from the anthropological category of race (*jinsu*), and therefore highly attractive to Asian nationalists who sought to distinguish various nationalist movements among the “yellow race” and, collectively, against the domination of the imperialism of the “white race.”²⁰

18. Shumpei Okamoto, “The Emperor and the Crowd: The Historical Significance of the Hibiya Riot,” in Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 258–75.

19. Eguchi Bokurō, “Gendai ni okeru minzoku oyobi minzokushugi,” in Iwanami Yūjirō, ed., *Iwanami kōza gendai shisō*, Vol. 3: *Minzoku no shisō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957), pp. 19–21.

20. Ishimoda Shō, *Rekishi to minzoku no hakken* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1952), pp. 104–6; on the ways in which the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) and race (*jinsu*) were understood at the time, cf. the definitions of the two concepts in the *Daijiten* (Tokyo: Keiseisha, 1917–37). “Race” (*jinsu*) is defined as “the divisions of humanity. Usually divided into the yellow race, the white race, the copper race, the black race, and mixed race” whereas “ethnic nation” (*minzoku*) is “tribal groups of people” (*jimmin no shuzoku*). Perhaps even more interesting is Yamagata Aritomo's famous letter of 1914 to Ōkuma in which he outlines his belief that world conflict is turning into a struggle between “the white race” and the “colored races.” The word he uses for race is *jinsu*. An English excerpt from the letter is available in Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*,

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 precisely over issues of ethnic nationalism and imperialism dealt a fatal blow to the existing international order. But its impact on Japan, which played a rather distant role overall in the war itself, may very well have been in bringing the issue of ethnic nationalist liberation to the forefront of intellectual and political debate. Prince Saionji Kinmochi's delegation to the Versailles Peace Talks found itself caught between two apparently contradictory positions of the leading powers. Woodrow Wilson had decided that "the self-determination of peoples" must be an essential component in the postwar world order. This principle, given ambiguous expression with the English word "peoples," was translated into Japanese with greater focus as the "self-determination of ethnic nations" (*minzoku jiketsu*). Yet, if members of the Saionji delegation concluded that Wilson's support for the equal claims of ethnic nations meant a tolerance of racial diversity, they were soon disillusioned by Wilson's joining in the rejection of the Japanese proposal for a clause in the League of Nations' charter denouncing racial discrimination (*jinshu sabetsu kinshi*).

Things were changing, and were Japan to pursue such national (as distinct from state) interests as Japanese immigration to the United States, it would seem more advantageous to represent them in ethnic national terms, rather than state interests (whose boundaries excluded Japanese naturalized U.S. citizens) or racial terms (which would equate Japanese with Chinese, Koreans, and other Asians). To be successful in the post-World-War-I nationalist discourse, Japan, now a full-fledged imperial power and hardly a colonized nation, nevertheless would find it advantageous to represent itself as the victim of cultural (if not political or economic) colonization by the West.

This is indeed what happened, in some cases. Yet, in light of this general movement throughout the world toward a reconsideration of ethnic nationalism in the 1920s, it is not surprising that Japanese intellectuals and critics also began to reconsider and redefine the nation. Nor should it be surprising that discussions of Japan as an ethnic nation were not reserved for ultrarightists. The liberal intellectual Abe Jirō included a section on ethnic nationalism in his *Santarō's Diary* which he published in 1918. In it, Abe, or "Santarō," argued that a truly humanistic, globally directed education must begin with a full understanding of how one's identity is always embedded in ethnicity. After emphasizing the importance of an appreciation of one's ethnic identity, Abe concluded:

Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 206–9. But to understand the nuances of Yamagata's language, consult the original in Tokutomi Iichirō, ed., *Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo den*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Minyūsha, 1933), pp. 923–24. For a commentary on Yamagata's theory of racial competition, see George Akita and Itō Takashi, "Yamagata Aritomo to 'jinshu kyōsō' ron," in *Nenpō kindai Nihon kenkyū*, Vol. 7, *Nihon gaikō no kiki ninshiki* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1985), pp. 95–118.

I would like to close this memorandum with the following note of caution. What I mean here by ethnic nationalism [*minzokushugi*] is not synonymous with state nationalism [*kokkashugi*]. What unites the ethnic nation is blood and history; but what unites the state is sovereignty and law as an expression of its will. The difference between state nationalism and ethnic nationalism will become most clear when one reflects on the political claims made by each. . . . In political terms, ethnic nationalism opposes imperialistic, state nationalism and is quite consistent with the claims of cosmopolitanism and humanism. It insists on the liberation of ethnic nations in the world, just as we insist on the freedom of individuals within a state.²¹

Abe was not alone among “liberals” in extolling the virtues of ethnic nationalism. As late as 1934 Yanaihara Tadao tried to preserve this humanistic interpretation of a benign ethnic nationalism in his essay on peace and the ethnic nation, which he published in the highly visible *Chūō kōron*. He too felt that the distinction between the ethnic nation and the state was an essential one, if ethnic nationalism were to maintain a critical stance in the context of an increasing Japanese imperialism. Yanaihara surveyed a variety of theories on nationalism and nationality that were most influential during the 1930s, concluding that “simply put, they all agree that the concept of the ethnic nation [*minzoku*] should not be equated immediately with the state [*kokka*] or the Staatsvolk [*kokumin*].”²² Whatever the nuances between the ethnic nation and the Staatsvolk, it is clear from the rest of Yanaihara’s writings that the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) was not the same as the state.

But support for ethnic nationalism on the left was perhaps most characteristic of Marxists and was closely related to developments within the proletarian literary movement which dominated literary discourse in Japan during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Deeply imbedded in the proletarian movement was a critique of universalist principles, particularly the bourgeois notion of individual identity grounded in a universal “ego.” When Georg Lukács declared that “the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge,” this and much more was implied.²³ Once the rational, universalist constraints to subjective, collective identities had been challenged, if not entirely lifted, a distinction between definitions of the people based on the specific experiences of class or eth-

21. Abe Jirō, “Shisōjō no minzokushugi,” in Inoue Masaji, ed., *Santarō no nikki* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1950), pp. 335–36. My thanks to Agustín Jacinto Zavala for alerting me to this important passage in Abe’s work.

22. Yanaihara Tadao, “Minzoku to heiwa,” *Yanaihara Tadao zenshū*, Vol. 18 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1964), p. 47. Yanaihara glosses *kokumin* as “Staatsvolk” on p. 45. To be fair, he often equates both *minzoku* and *kokumin* with the “nation”: I have usually added “ethnic” to help distinguish the kind of nation that he means by *minzoku*, a sense of nation that is much more distanced from the state than is “Staatsvolk.”

23. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 20.

nicity could only be maintained through historical practice. The history of the rise and fall of proletariat literature in Japan is a complex one and lies outside the scope of this essay. Here I would like merely to draw attention to how a theory of cultural production that eventually meshed with the ethnic nationalism Stalin had upheld in his 1913 essay grew out of the proletariat movement's earlier attempt to reconsider the relationship between "politics" and "culture."²⁴

This debate on "politics" and "culture" can best be seen in the writings of Kamei Katsuichirō and Hayashi Fusao, two influential members of the proletarian literature movement who later became key members of the Japan Romantic School. Particularly sensitive to the dilemma facing politicized writers, they entered a debate with Kobayashi Takiji, Miyamoto Kenji, and other proletarian writers over the contradictions in contemporary interpretations of Marxist theories of cultural production. Hayashi suggested as early as 1932 that literary activity was not merely a transparent recording of an external political reality, but carried with it its own "internal" reality. He argued that the ultimate responsibility of an author was "the completion of the author's own internal world . . . [and then] to drag the readers along, willy nilly, to that other world. . . . It is only when this kind of passion is realized that an author has the right to expect the gratitude of the masses."²⁵

Kamei further developed this line of argument two years later in his own essay on political desire as artistic temperament. He drew from Hayashi's works to develop a theory of the artist as a perpetual "rebel" (as distinct from a "revolutionist" who must become part of the new establishment after the revolution succeeds) whose own sense of identity was always caught between the rival demands of skeptical reason and creative passion. In the same vein, in arguing that literature should not be reduced to politics, he stressed that he was not referring to politics "in the broad sense as manifested in all social class relations (including culture)" but "in the narrow sense of politics as manifested in partisan relations."²⁶ Here it would seem that this restricted sense of "politics," along with his notion of a "revolutionist" who no longer rebels, might be seen as signifying the post-Restoration political elites and their own specific concept of the national

24. A very useful overview of the proletarian literary movement may be found in Yoshio Iwamoto, "Aspects of the Proletarian Literary Movement in Japan," in H. D. Harootunian and Bernard Silberman, eds., *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taisho Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 156–82. The debate over politics and culture is discussed in Takami Jun, *Shōwa bungaku seisuishu*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū Shinsha, 1958), pp. 9–37; and some key texts in the debate may be found in Odagiri Hideo, ed., *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1956), pp. 135–75.

25. Hayashi Fusao, "Sakka no tame ni," in Hirano Ken, ed., *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, Vol. 3 (1957), p. 140.

26. Kamei Katsuichirō, "Geijutsuteki kishitsu to shite no seiji yoku," in Hirano, ed., *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, Vol. 3, p. 167.

community as the state (*kokka*). Both Hayashi's advocacy of an "internal reality" and Kamei's invocation of "rebellion" against the established political order converged in laying the cultural foundations for a broader acceptance of a subjectively defined concept of the nation based on the people and distinct from the reality of the modern Japanese state.

While Kamei and Hayashi prepared the way for the Japan Romantic School through the highly proclaimed "Cultural Renaissance" (Bungei Fukkōki), one of Japan's greatest twentieth-century novelists, Yokomitsu Riichi, strongly influenced the subsequent development of this debate on culture through his 1935 essay, "Junsui shōsetsu ron." Yokomitsu sought to bridge the gap between the realism of mass politics and the romanticism of elite literature through an appeal to his fellow writers to create texts grounded in the Japanese "ethnic nation" (*minzoku*). This return to a Japanese "specificity" would liberate writers from a universal realism and open up the possibility of creative works developed in line with the specific conditions of Japanese culture.

Yokomitsu was too much an artist to believe in a simplistic mimesis of an ethnic "reality"; rather, the thrust of his argument was directed at the conditions for producing a literature that would represent, in literary practice, a Japanese ethnic identity that was not completely compatible with European rationality. Yet, ironically, Yokomitsu knew that such a position could only be imagined through the work of Western writers such as André Gide, and he particularly found useful Gide's insights into the mechanisms of self-consciousness and the liberation of the ego. Nonetheless, what most contemporary readers of this complex essay remembered best must have been Yokomitsu's conclusion that "the moment has finally arrived to think about the ethnic nation [*minzoku*]." ²⁷

Ethnic Nationalism and the Japan Romantic School

Certainly, the most sustained attempt in Japan during the 1930s to heed the call "to think about the ethnic nation" and even to articulate a concept of the ethnic nation as distinct from state nationalism was carried out by a group of writers and literary critics who styled themselves the Japan Romantic School. From the announcement for the school published in *Cogito* in late 1934, one gains a sense that these Romantics were about something new, even if their precise goal was still shrouded in heavy doses of romantic ambiguity:

The Japan Romantic School is the present poem of our "youth of the age."
We reject everything but the lofty tone of these poems of youth and, untroubled by yesterday's customs, move forward in search of tomorrow's truth. . . .

27. Yokomitsu Riichi, "Junsui shōsetsu ron," in Hirano, ed., *Gendai Nihon bungaku ron-sōshi*, Vol. 3, p. 79.

The Japan Romantic School pays no attention to history. Rather, the Japan Romantic School excels in all things and is the most pure and beautiful existence. Today, Japan needs such artists and the people require someone who can most acutely sense their demands.²⁸

The tone of this announcement is remarkably similar to that of many of the early German romantics such as Novalis who, in this early, prereactionary stage of German romanticism, exhibited a contrived indifference to politics, a “lofty unconcern with the particular form of state life,” and sought to grasp the German nation as a cultural people in a way that was closely related to the universalist and humanistic ideals of modernism.²⁹ The similarity was no accident. Many members of the Japan Romantic School had studied German literature and culture in higher school and university, and they often expressed their admiration for such German writers as Novalis, Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Schlegel, and Heinrich Heine.

One of the earliest critics of the day to grasp the significance of the Japan Romantic School and to criticize the new direction it proposed was Miki Kiyoshi. In November 1934, the same month that the advertisement for the Japan Romantic School appeared in *Cogito*, Miki wrote an article in the *Miyako shinbun* on “the appearance of romanticism” that accused the Japan Romantic School of merely repeating the universalist, cultural claims of the early German Romantic School, and he suggested that the Japan Romantic School had little new to offer. Miki’s criticism of the Japan Romantic School would take up a significant part of his energies over the next several years, but one finds a clue to the later development of his criticism of romanticism in his description in this article of the Japan Romantic School as “the protection of ‘the artist’s disposition’ from the disposition of the citizen [*shimin*].”³⁰

In January of the following year, Kamei responded with a defense, suggesting that Miki’s argument that the Japan Romantic School was merely an exercise in comparative romanticism “seemed as though he was speaking of someone else.” But Kamei did not address the question of whether the Romantics felt threatened by civic nationalism or whether they were proposing a different concept of nation or citizen.³¹ Miki, however, who was drawing closer to the rational technology of the state as a means of saving Japan from fascism, grew increasingly certain that “fascism in Japan [was] a style of thought or an emotional mood that stressed emotion over ratio-

28. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Nihon rōmanha kōkoku,” *Cogito*, No. 11 (December 1934), p. 149.

29. Yada Toshitaka, “Rōmanshugi to minzoku gainen,” in Iwanami, ed., *Iwanami kōza gendai shisō*, Vol. 3, p. 56.

30. Miki Kiyoshi, “Rōmanshugi no taitō,” *Miyako shinbun*, Nov. 8–11, 1934. Reprinted in *Miki Kiyoshi zenshū*, Vol. 13 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), pp. 157–67; see pp. 158–59.

31. Kamei Katsuichirō, “Rōmanshugi no imi,” *Bungei shuto*, Jan. 1935; reprinted in *Kamei Katsuichirō zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1971–75), Vol. 3, p. 323.

nality, and [Miki] implied that writers like those in the Romantic School could fuel its growth.”³²

This debate between Miki and Kamei suggests how far apart concepts of the Japanese nation were growing in the mid-1930s. Miki believed that the difference between “Western knowledge” and “Japanese knowledge” merely reflected a variance in the *topos* or “place” where universal technology was put into practice, thus assuming a concept of a distinct national space that was essentially homogeneous.³³ But the Japan Romantic School sought to contest the notion of a monolithic conflation of state and nation by contesting the claims that a modern, rational state made on traditional Japanese cultural identity. In attempting to sever culture from the modern state and relocate it back to the people, the Romantic School showed a prescient awareness of how the modern discipline of history had been mobilized to provide narrative structures that would make the identification of the state, nation, and Japanese culture seem natural and commonsensical. Consequently, the rejection of “history” in the advertisement for the Romantic School should be understood in reference to the familiar form of nation-state narratives and, particularly, the successful construction since Meiji of a “wealthy state and strong military” (*fukoku kyōhei*), while “Japan” seems to have referred to the Romantics’ ideal and eternal ethnic nation rather than to the actual modern Japanese state.

There is, in fact, a fascinating if incipient critique of history in the writings of these romantics that in many ways foreshadows the critique of “History” offered more recently by scholars drawing from deconstructionist and subaltern theories and that sheds light on comparative problems in how the nation, state, and culture have been understood and represented. For example, Robert Young has suggested, in relation to Edward Said’s work, that “to the extent that all knowledge is produced within institutions of various sorts, *there is always a determined relation to the state* and to its political

32. Miles Fletcher, “Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Showa Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (November 1979), p. 49. Although Fletcher does not directly address the problem of ethnic nationalism against the state, this important essay remains an essential starting point for understanding how state ideologues could see their defense of the rational state as protecting Japan from more radical forms of nationalism and fascism.

33. Miki Kiyoshi, “Nihon-teki chisei ni tsuite,” *Bungakkai*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April 1937), p. 68. Miki’s views were in sharp contrast to those of Tosaka Jun who argued, at about the same time, that “Japan” should be approached “dualistically” (*nigen-teki ni*) rather than “monistically” (*ichigen-teki ni*). His proposal, which was quickly dismissed by Kobayashi Hideo and others participating in the symposium, was made in the context of wide-ranging and fascinating discussions on topics such as “the duality of culture” and “the rivalry of internationality and ethnic nationality.” In contrast, Miki’s comments at the symposium mainly bemoaned the lack of state support for a strong cultural policy. See the transcripts of the symposium in “Gendai bungaku no Nihon-teki dōkō,” *Bungakkai*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (February 1937), esp. pp. 210–17.

practices at home and abroad.”³⁴ Young suggests that “History,” as it evolved in the Western tradition, is one of these institutions and, as such, developed a totalistic epistemology that fused all particularities within the universal mission of an expansive state, where traditional identity and the modern world intersected. Recently, Gyan Prakash has articulated the implications of this “Western History” for the non-West more forcefully, arguing that “the dominance of Europe as history not only subalternizes non-Western societies, but also serves the aims of their nation-states.”³⁵

Similar arguments that positioned Japan as a non-Western state oppressed by Western culture were enjoying wide circulation in Japan during the 1930s. Kawakami Tetsutarō argued against Tosaka Jun’s belief in the universality of science by questioning the cultural neutrality of history:

Well, I think I understand what Mr. Tosaka is saying. I believe you trust science, Mr. Tosaka. But the real nature of what you call science is history. I think that this concept of “historical” is connected to the concept of “the West.” . . . Now this concept of the West can be applied in Japan, but I have considerable doubts as to how it is applied.³⁶

Tosaka responded that science worked quite well in Japan, as evidenced by how well trams and trains, apparently oblivious to the cultural limits of science, ran in Japan. Kawakami and others at the symposium remained unmoved. As they saw things, the critical question was not the universality of the natural sciences, but the relationship of cultural sciences and national power. For them, and for the Romantics, the most pressing issue was how to restore confidence in national culture when the very future of Japanese culture seemed threatened by the modern Japanese state’s internalization of Western culture for its own purposes.

Perhaps the most powerful critique of history and its role in supporting the state came from Yasuda Yojūrō, the acknowledged leader of the Romantic School. Yasuda was a fundamentally ironic thinker who shared Yokomitsu’s insight that a Japanese cultural identity could no longer be produced except through Western culture since Japan had already begun the process of modernization. After first reaffirming Kamei’s distinction between “politics” in the narrow sense (which he too rejected) and politics as cultural practice, Yasuda described his fellow Romantics as “first-rate and proper transplanters to Japan of the spirit of the German Romantic School in order to put into practice a political theory—political theory in the truest sense—

34. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 127. Emphasis added.

35. Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 5 (December 1994), p. 1485.

36. Remarks attributed to Kawakami Tetsutarō in “Gendai bungaku no Nihon-teki dōkō,” p. 214.

that would lift the Japanese people to the heights of Goethe.”³⁷ He was quite conscious of the contradiction in attempting to create a conception of the people from a knowledge base that was foreign to most of the people themselves, but he saw it as inevitable that “before we can provide what the people seek, we must freely construct the people that we seek.”³⁸ This dilemma was merely the result of the post-Meiji-Restoration social and political revolution in which certain forms of Western culture were mobilized by the state to construct a specific version of national identity congruent with its own interests. Consequently, Yasuda noted, nobody yet had told the real history of Japan:

We are a world-class ethnic nation with a history and genealogy that we need not discuss. This is why we have not had one historian since the Meiji Restoration who really talks about our history. The major works of the famous historians at the government universities are mainly middle-brow textbooks.³⁹

How to recover this “history” of the Japanese people from within a modern outlook that equated history with the fortunes of the state remained a critical problem for Yasuda’s cultural theory and one that helps explain much of his attraction to the German romantics.

Yasuda saw the German romantics as an ideal means of illustrating how culture had been marginalized by the mobilization of historical science in the service of the modern state. This appeal to German romanticism positioned Yasuda within a critique of the modern Japanese state, not as too Western or too universal, but for being too particularistic in rejecting the universalism of human cultural ideals. From romanticism, Yasuda derived a theory of art that promised “to correctly grasp the past” in ways that the modern discipline of history had failed to do.⁴⁰ In a wide-ranging essay on German romanticism and cultural theory that touched on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Schlegel, Heinrich von Kleist, G. W. F. Hegel, and others, Yasuda ultimately concluded that the most accurate “historian” of the spirit of the Romantic Age was Hölderlin, a “pure poet” who refused to accept “the affirmation of the alienation of art and life [which is] the capitalist social theory that destroys the pure spirit of an artist.”⁴¹ Through Hölderlin, Yasuda sought to uncover a premodern concept of art as

37. Yasuda Yojūrō, *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1985–89; hereafter cited as *YYz*), Vol. 3, pp. 407–8.

38. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Konnichi no rōmanshugi,” in *YYz*, Vol. 3, p. 48.

39. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Nihon rōman-teki jidai,” *Yamato shinbun*, Aug. 12–14, 1938. Reprinted in *YYz*, Vol. 9, pp. 264–69; see p. 264.

40. Kawamura Jiro, “Yasuda Yojūrō ron,” in *Tenbō*, No. 93 (September 1966), p. 139.

41. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Kiyorakana shijin,” *Bungakkai*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1934), p. 218.

history since “the contemporary way of thinking about art . . . is merely an ideology that appeared with civil society—or at least with the maturation of the humanist spirit that arose during the Renaissance.”⁴²

German romantics like Hölderlin created works that “drew one’s attention to the flow of history,” and from this historical vantage point, Yasuda discerned a contradiction between the statism of Bonapartism and the “revolution of internationalism” offered by the German focus on the cultural/ethnic nation:

He [Hölderlin] was probably the first to discover the ethnic nation [*minzoku*]. His sentiments did not discern a dialectic between a constant effort to reach the infinite and the bliss of a reality that is conscious of limits. This was simply because he was not a politician who wrote literature to instruct the citizens [*kokumin*]; he had to be a writer who sang of his own spirit.⁴³

To Yasuda, the German romantics, and particularly Hölderlin, remained the most significant illustration of a “spiritual history” of the human quest for liberation that had been marginalized by a more progressive form of history that had reduced poetry and poets to the status of ornamental decorations (*tokonoma no okimono*).⁴⁴

Through his focus on German romantics, Yasuda hoped to dislodge a belief in the Japanese state’s representation of Western culture as rational, progressive, and supportive of artificial political forms, and to reveal the polysemy inherent in Western culture. Thus, he wrote, “I do not reject the study of foreign culture. It is all we know. Furthermore, the study of foreign literature has finally taught us the necessity of determining the Japanese classics.”⁴⁵ Yet, while Yasuda understood the necessity of using Western culture to access Japanese tradition (the West’s invention of the East), he refused to essentialize Western culture as the only locus of universal values. Indeed, he sought to transcend the simplistic opposition of West (universal) versus East (particular) by reaffirming that culture carried with it a universal value that was only frustrated by the temporally specific structures of politics (i.e., the nation-state). He looked back to eighth-century Japan as a period of flourishing cosmopolitanism and suggested that this was the time the Japanese truly experienced a universal culture.

The nuances here of the early stages of German romanticism are strong, but we should not overlook the implicit criticism of the modern Japanese state as well. In his critique of “what is Japanese” (1938), Yasuda argued strongly and passionately against allegations by critics such as Aono Suekichi that he was a fascist, maintaining that his views should be distinguished

42. Ibid., pp. 218–19.

43. Ibid., p. 228.

44. Ibid., pp. 228, 230.

45. Yasuda, “Gendai hyōronka no tachiba,” in *YYz*, Vol. 3, p. 408.

from fascism since he was strongly critical of the Japanese state. The colonization of Japan, he noted, was internal and stemmed from the Japanese state:

If we can say that Japan's conquest of the eighteenth century is still incomplete, it is because Japan's liberation from colonial forms is still incomplete. Yet, when we look back on "history" and reflect on the "miracle" of the "Meiji Restoration," our attitude cannot be so easily rationalized. Simply put, Aono's "miracle" is nothing but gratitude for what is represented by the name "Ito Hirobumi" [i.e., the modern Japanese state].

At any rate, our generation, which set its sights on culture from a realization of Japan's incomplete conquest of the eighteenth century, has started to write a topography of the Japanese soul. That the fascist forms of Japan today are being directed by the bureaucracy is an abominable disgrace. I have no hopes that a new bureaucracy might bring our Japan in step with Russia which is creating a "wealthy proletariat" in the West and thereby bring us closer to overcoming eighteenth-century cultural forms. I just cannot bring myself to trust the "history" that is the special temperament of the current bureaucracy.⁴⁶

Consequently, for Yasuda and his fellow Romantics, the problem confronting Japan in the 1930s was how best to resurrect this "eradicated history" that would reveal the cultural and ethnic foundations for a new Japanese national identity; they often argued, contra Miki, that this attempt to restore a "universal Japanese culture" should not be reduced to fascism which, as Yasuda concluded, was the "eradication of things through state power."⁴⁷

To fully appreciate the Japan Romantic School's romanticism and its critical orientation to the rational state, one might compare the School's project with the poststructuralist and decolonization theories raised by recent critics. A shared romanticism underlies these critiques of history and the state, as illustrated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's suggestion that postcolonial criticism "consists in saying an 'impossible "no" to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately.'"⁴⁸ In a similarly ambivalent mood, Yasuda announced that the basis of the Japan Romantic School lay in "the irony of a liberated Japan that simultaneously can ensure con-

46. Yasuda, *YYz*, Vol. 6, p. 193. Needless to say, Yasuda did not intend to apply Western chronology indiscriminately to Japan. To him, "the eighteenth century" was not a universal marker of history, but a specific, historicist reference to the time when he located the origins of the modern state in Europe. It is in this context that he condemns those Japanese who worship the founders of the modern Japanese state which, of course, appeared in Japan nearly one hundred years after "the eighteenth century" had drawn to a close.

47. Yasuda, *YYz*, Vol. 6, pp. 190–91.

48. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, the Future of Colonial Studies," *New Literary History*, Vol. 21 (1990), p. 28; cited in Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," p. 1487.

struction and destruction while Japan's new spirit is still in its current chaotic and inchoate condition."⁴⁹ And Kamei added that the Japan Romantic School arose as a form of "irony opposed to vulgar realism [which] . . . would build a realism . . . by recovering as fundamental to the spirit of realism those elements such as an intense subjectivity, an idealistic spirit, a lofty intellectual character, and a scientific cultivation that had been lost under the earlier form of 'realism.'" ⁵⁰ In highlighting the impossibility of their necessary resistance to human structures, the Romantics also were suggesting their already implicated position within Western culture and their own national tradition that had constructed the modern Japanese state.

As suggested above, the role of poetry was central in this construction of a concept of the Japanese as a cultural people, and it lay at the very heart of the Romantic view of the nation. Poetry was not merely seen as creating a sense of shared social space that would rival, if not negate, the "history" of the post-Meiji state. As the tone of the announcement cited above reveals, poetry also was associated with some vague hope for a new concept of a national people that would overcome the more recent painful realities of a nation divided by class and regional differences. Romantic nationalists have often turned to poetry in a belief that "there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests—above all in the form of poetry and songs. . . . there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody."⁵¹ Kamei reflected that Plato's call for poets to be driven from his republic stemmed not from a failure to appreciate culture, but from a recognition that technical artists with no political concerns should not have a place in his "ideal country"—and Kamei called for a realization of Plato's 2,000-year-old dream by Japanese poets who understood that they were meant to address the nation.⁵² What remained to be seen was whether such a "poeticization" of the nation could resist totalizations of the national space that might eventually collapse any distinction between "nation" and "state" under the aegis of a resurgent "nation-state."

49. Yasuda Yojūrō, "Wagakuni ni okeru rōmanshugi no gaikan," in *YYz*, Vol. 11, p. 302. Hashikawa Bunzō has noted the similarities between this passage and Carl Schmitt's description of the political romantic's belief that "the reservation of all infinite possibilities lies in irony" in his *Nihon rōmanha hihan josetsu* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1965), pp. 40–41. I have drawn the line from Schmitt from Guy Oakes' translation of Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 72.

50. Kamei Katsuichirō, "Rōmanshugi no imi," in *Kamei Katsuichirō zenshū*, Vol. 3, pp. 323–24.

51. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 132.

52. Kamei Katsuichirō, "Dorei-naki girisu no kuni e," *Nihon romanha*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1935), pp. 20–21.

The Reconciliation of Ethnic Nation and State

While Yasuda insisted on the differences between his interest in Japanese culture and the cultural ideologies of fascism, he was mainly concerned with producing a new historical perspective that would redefine the “people” by providing a cultural framework for an alternative view that stressed a more populist concept of the Japanese nation. Yet, ironically, in his view, as in the post-Meiji political culture, the emperor was given a central role in what he called, drawing from Asano Akira, “history as the emperor wants it” (*ten-shin rekishi*). But in contrast to the Meiji state’s appropriation of the modern, beef-eating emperor as the cornerstone of its state nationalism, Yasuda represented the emperor in a thoroughly poetic, romantic way.⁵³ He stated his intention as “the clarification of a ‘Japan’ that must experience the present world historical moment and, in order to bring about such a loftier ‘Japan,’ the construction through cultural history of a genealogy of the lineage of that ‘Japan.’”⁵⁴ This genealogy presented the emperor, not as a modern individual, but as a collective line of tragic emperors who, imprisoned by political elites, invariably expressed through their poetry a longing to be reunited with their people.

Yasuda stopped short of suggesting a return to actual imperial rule, but the implicit criticism of the false Meiji “Restoration” was clear. From Retired Emperor Gotoba and his failed bid at an imperial restoration in the early thirteenth century through the wandering poet Bashō of the seventeenth century, Yasuda described an imperial tradition of poetic culture that was defined by its opposition to secular political power. Consequently, he imagined poets as moral voices who best articulated this lost tradition; they were, he wrote, “always at the forefront of history’s will and the people’s determination.”⁵⁵ What made this poetic genealogy particularly appealing in the context of ethnic nationalism was its absorption of the individual in a collective identity, as each individual emperor was merely the most recent incarnation of the same, enduring cultural tradition. As the unifying principle of the Japanese people, the emperor also suggested, however, the his-

53. George Akita and Hirose Yoshihiro recently have challenged the long-held view that the modern Japanese monarchy was constructed on a Prussian model, noting that some Meiji elites, such as Inoue Kowashi, had a British model of the monarchy in mind. See Akita and Hirose, “The British Model: Inoue Kowashi and the Ideal Monarchical System,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter 1994). Both sides of the debate, however, agree on the Western origins of the modern Japanese monarchy, whether British or Prussian in inspiration, and this is the only relevant issue for Yasuda and the Japan Romantic School who saw the redefinition of the emperor in Western form as the penultimate expression of Western cultural colonization in Japan.

54. Yasuda, “Taikan shijin no goichininsha,” *YYz*, Vol. 5, p. 11.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

torical and cultural differences that separated the Japanese from other Asians.

In spring of 1938, Yasuda embarked on his first (and only) trip outside Japan. He joined Satō Haruo as a special correspondent for the journal *Shin Nihon* (which Satō, Hayashi Fusao, and other members of the Shin Nihon Bunka Kai had just founded in January 1938—not to be confused with the earlier journal *Shin Nihon* [1911–18]) on a journey that took them to Korea, Manchuria, and northern China, where he toured Beijing under the guidance of the Japanese sinologist Takeuchi Yoshimi. What effect, if any, experience in a foreign country had on this young ethnic nationalist is a matter of debate among specialists.⁵⁶ But it was around this time that a more historically specific form of ethnic nationalism in modern Japan, with its ironic relationship to other nationalist movements, both Eastern and Western, begins to surface in Yasuda's writings. That is to say, one can detect a shift around late 1938 in Yasuda's approach to ethnic nationalism that reflects the distinction between the "primordial" and "boundary" approaches to ethnicity that Kosaku Yoshino recently has outlined. As Yoshino explains, primordial approaches to ethnicity attach "supreme importance to the continuity over time of the ethnic community by emphasizing these two aspects [kinship and culture] of the primordial ties." Boundary approaches to ethnicity downplay cultural determinants to emphasize that the identity of members of an ethnic group can "not be established in terms of their shared cultural traits, but only by considering their relationship with neighbouring groups."⁵⁷ Prior to Yasuda's experience in foreign countries, his approach was very close to that of primordialism, but increasingly he began to emphasize the unitary character of the Japanese ethnic nation and the state, while contrasting the mission of this newly synthesized "Japan" with threats from outside.

Yet, as Yoshino notes, the two approaches are not always mutually exclusive, and both culture and boundary remained influential in Yasuda's nationalism. His definition of the Japanese as an "ethnic nation" (*minzoku*) rather than part of an Asian "race" (*jinshu*) reflected a tentative recognition of the historical legacy of the Meiji Restoration which had both yielded the modern state and alienated the Japanese from other Asians. At the same time, Yasuda continued to hope that modernity might be overcome through

56. See my discussion of the debate in *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 14–15. Perhaps the most provocative view is that of Oketani Hideaki, who argues that Yasuda's discussion of the Japanese victory at Sūchow in May 1938 was actually a carefully coded critique of the new constraints the state imposed on cultural debate in Japan when the National Mobilization Law went into effect the same month. See Oketani, *Yasuda Yojūrō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1983), pp. 79–80.

57. Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociology Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 70–71.

the construction of a collective identity grounded in cultural specificity. A heightened appreciation of ethnicity would fuse together the ethnic nation and the state into the nation-state (*minzoku kokka*),⁵⁸ thereby putting an end to divisiveness over how the nation ought to be represented:

That we have professional thinkers who maintain there is a gap between the thinking of those in the nation-state crowd [*minzoku kokka gun*] and ethnic nationalism [*minzokushugi*] is really a reflection on the rather unusual intellectual customs of our country. But with the establishment of the New Order, the professional principles and tendencies of writers will change.⁵⁹

Certainly by 1940 when Yasuda published this statement, his critical attitude toward the state had moderated somewhat. But he still believed that the ethnic nation required better historical representation, since it was “the cultural side [of ethnicity] that must be emphasized.”⁶⁰ Consequently, he walked a narrow line between maintaining the unitary character of the Japanese nation and the state and arguing for a new form of history that would recover Japan’s true historical greatness from the “civilization and enlightenment ideology” of the “official historiographers” whose work aided in “the dominance of civilization which, since the Meiji period, had turned Japan into a place of colonial culture.”⁶¹

It was a delicate balancing act. Ethnic nationalism was to suggest both

58. This equation of *minzoku kokka* with “nation-state” may strike some readers as strange, since the precise definition of the nation-state has largely been lost in the English-language literature. We now often use the terms “nation-state,” “nation,” and “state” interchangeably, even though the terms originally referred to quite discrete entities. (See Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, Is a State, Is an Ethnic Group, Is a . . .,” reprinted in Connor, *Ethnonationalism*.) Connor’s analysis, important enough in its own right, takes on added significance when compared with prewar Japanese theorists of nationalism such as Yanaihara Tadao, who make almost identical arguments, tracing the definition of the nation (translated into Japanese as *minzoku*) to the Latin root *nasci* (cf. Connor, “A Nation is a Nation,” pp. 94–95, and Yanaihara Tadao, “Minzoku to kokka,” *Yanaihara Tadao zenshū* [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965], Vol. 18, pp. 273–354, at pp. 278–79). Yet, without a clear understanding of the distinction between the nation and the state, Yasuda’s point is hard to follow. For a brief summary of some strategies the state employed to coopt the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) within a renewed emphasis on the nation-state (*minzoku kokka*), see my chapter on “Nationalism as Dialectics: Ethnicity, Moralism, and the State in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” in James Heisig and John Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994).

59. Yasuda Yojūrō, “‘Bungaku no tachiba’ oboegaki,” *YYz*, Vol. 7, p. 269. Yasuda’s argument on the unique Japanese tradition of distinguishing between nation and state contrasts nicely with Ishida Takeshi’s argument, noted above, that prewar Japan was unlike Germany in not having a tradition of distinguishing nation from state.

60. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Minzoku no yūetsusei ni tsuite,” *YYz*, Vol. 11, pp. 79–80.

61. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Nihon rekishigaku no kensetsu: kokushi kakunin no mondai,” *Minzoku-teki yūetsukan*, in *YYz*, Vol. 9, pp. 29, 39. See also “Atarashii kokushi no kensetsu,” pp. 66–72, in the same volume.

a cultural difference from the West and, simultaneously, a recognition that no other Asian nation had yet achieved what Japan had:

Japanists today do not explain the essence of Japaneseness by rejecting everything of European origin or all elements of foreign culture. They explain how Japan alone accepted European and American culture, but digested it in a way that enabled it to spiritually conquer the West. What was this spiritual conquest? It is evident in the fact that Japan resisted the invasion of the West; preserved its dignity as the only independent, civilized country in Asia; prevented the complete destruction of Asia; and is now a unique island-empire nation that preserves Asia's hopes, history, and blood line.⁶²

This sense of cultural isolation is essential to Yasuda's insistence that the Japanese must arrive at a "true sense of ethnic superiority," which he tried to separate from the current (modern) forms of ethnic superiority that stemmed from the "ideology of global politics of the white peoples." Yasuda's "ethnic superiority" was meant to apply against both East and West. A "true sense of ethnic superiority," he promised, would also restore the confidence of the many Japanese who "traveled" (as Yasuda put it, conveniently overlooking the reality that most Japanese were there as drafted soldiers, not sightseers) to the Asian continent in the early 1940s only to conclude mistakenly that the "shallow civilization" of "Chinese despotism" was superior to Japan's own "courtly culture."⁶³

Needless to say, Yasuda held little sympathy for other Asian ethnic nationalist movements, denouncing Korean ethnic nationalism as little more than longings for a modernity whose material benefits would displace traditional culture and morality, as only the Japanese knew so well. Reflecting on his time in Korea, he wrote: "This is what I told the Korean youths. I won't express one iota of sympathy for your ethnic nationalism, nor am I any more inclined now to adopt a sentimental view of your independence movement."⁶⁴ Nor was Yasuda more favorably disposed toward Chinese

62. Yasuda, "Nihon rōman-teki jidai," *YYz*, Vol. 9, pp. 265–66. Although Yasuda generally prefers the term *minzoku* when discussing the Japanese, and this term dominates in this article as well, there is an exceptional use of the word *jinshu* (race) in this essay in reference to the Chinese that deserves attention. Yasuda uses the word for "race" to argue that the Japanese are a race that is breaking new ground with a world-historical *idée* (*minzoku*) and are therefore a more "progressive" race than the Chinese. But he also argues that the Chinese, by failing to develop their ethnic nationalism in the modern world, "are an uncultured, illogical, nonidealistic people who seem to be a completely different race from the classical Chinese" (p. 266). That is, in both cases the word "race" emphasizes aspects of the Japanese and Chinese that Yasuda ascribes to modernity, while serving (like ethnicity) to further distinguish between Chinese and Japanese people. Whether Yasuda's unusual use of the word for "race" is intentional or whether it reflects the nature of this piece (it was written for a newspaper) is unclear.

63. Yasuda, *Minzoku-teki yūetsukan*, pp. 12–13.

64. Yasuda, "Kokugo no fukyū undō ni suite," *YYz*, Vol. 11, p. 352.

nationalism. He called China “an ethnic nation that lost its *idée*” and even went so far as to argue that “it is Japan’s mission to pulverize Chiang Kai-shek’s New Movement which is the last holdout of Anglo-American culture in China.”⁶⁵ There was a palpable irony to this argument for Japanese leadership in Asia, however, for even while Yasuda characterized his position as “beyond modernity,” it should be quite clear that he was merely projecting onto his Asian neighbors what Henri Baudet has identified as one of the central traditions of the West: the myth of the noble savage.⁶⁶ Chinese and Korean nationalism could only be redeemed by renouncing Western culture and retaining their cultural purity by cooperating with Japan in its mission to preserve the authenticity of a traditional Asia from the baneful effects of modernity.

Even as Yasuda tried to erase the ironic tensions between modern Japanese “state nationalism” as a legacy of Westernization and “ethnic nationalism” as part of its reimagination of an Asian heritage, the problem did not completely disappear. In fact, one finds the issue resurfacing in a remarkable series of debates on “Overcoming Modernity” held in Tokyo on July 23 and 24, 1942. The debates were moderated by Kawakami Tetsutarō who openly confessed his hopes that the Japanese debate on modernity, sponsored by the Japanese Council on Intellectual Cooperation, would succeed in accomplishing what the League of Nations’ sponsored conversations on the universality of European culture (1932–38) had not. That is to say, if the European conversations promoted a view of civilized culture as rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition, thereby denying cultural legitimacy to nationalist movements in non-European countries,⁶⁷ the Japanese symposium could be seen as an effort at encouraging rebellions against the West, so long as other Asian nations accepted the intellectual and political guidance of Japan’s

65. Yasuda, “Nihon no rōman-teki jidai,” *YYz*, Vol. 9, p. 267.

66. Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, trans. by Elizabeth Wentholt (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), pp. 10–11.

67. Drawing from Satō Masaaki’s Japanese translation of two of the League of Nations’ International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation monographs which appeared in 1936 and 1937, Watanabe Kazutami notes that the “conversations” became mired between “the European mind” and “nationalism” and never overcame the division. (Watanabe Kazutami, *Nashonarizumu no ryōgisei* [Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1984].) This interpretation is borne out by the records of the institute, which reveal that many influential leaders within the institute increasingly turned against the nationalism of colonial areas. The institute began with investigations into the “future of civilization” (Madrid, 1933) and “the future of the European mind” (Paris, 1933), but by 1936 found its work increasingly dominated by the problem of assuring “Peaceful Change.” For example, Emanuel Moresco, who was responsible for *Colonial Questions and Peace* (Paris: League of Nations, 1939), one volume in the institute’s series on Peaceful Change, cited Jules Brévié’s assessment on Indo-China that “nationalist aspirations, legitimate in themselves, might not be adopted to the needs of the life of nations” and then added that “these words have an application to other countries than Indo-China” (p. 272).

wartime leadership. Yet, in order to succeed in “overcoming modernity,” “modernity” itself first had to be effectively dislodged from association with contemporary Japan. This proved to be an extremely difficult matter, and ultimately led to a general consensus at the conclusion of the Japanese debates that they had failed in this goal.

There is much to learn from this attempt at “overcoming modernity,” and particularly from the contributions of members of the Romantic School to it. While Yasuda declined to participate, Kamei and Hayashi did, and they offered some of the most sanguine assessments of the Japanese attempt to overcome modernity.⁶⁸ This was not surprising, given the Romantic School’s belief that a culturally constructed “ethnic nation” (*minzoku*) could eventually displace the modern reality of the Japanese state. Hayashi, in fact, could now connect his earlier cultural theories with a cultural nationalism centered on the emperor as the sole legacy of a Japanese nation that predated the modern state. He appealed to a spirit of devotion to the emperor (*kinnō no kokoro*), which he protested could not be equated with either Western or Chinese concepts of loyalty, but which was the essential cultural attribute that defined the Japanese as more than merely a biological “race” and without which patriotism was impossible.⁶⁹

Neither Kamei nor Hayashi made much reference to the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) in the discussions on “overcoming modernity.”⁷⁰ But both emphasized the need to establish a “national literature” (*kokumin bungaku*) that drew from elements of culture, ethnicity, and the state. Kamei described the way that such a national literature would bring together the cultural claims of ethnicity and the political reality of the state most explicitly:

National literature is now our single commitment. . . . What is this commitment we speak of? It is the determination to dissolve one’s sense of self as a writer or intellectual and to steep oneself in the depths of feeling as a citizen [*kokumin*], to want to become one of the common people [*sōmō no tami*], a martyr to the ethnic nation [*minzoku no ichi giseisha*].⁷¹

68. See Kawakami Tetsutarō and Takeuchi Yoshimi, eds., *Kindai no chōkoku* (Tokyo: Fuzambō, 1979), pp. 200, 264.

69. Hayashi Fusao, “Kinnō no kokoro,” in *ibid.*, especially pp. 83, 98, 110. The English word Hayashi contrasts with *kinnō*, “Royalty,” must be a misprint for “Loyalty.” Minamoto Ryōen agrees this was a misprint. See his “The Symposium on ‘Overcoming Modernity,’” in Heisig and Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings*, p. 214, note 32.

70. One exceptional reference to the ethnic nation is at the end of Kamei’s essay, where he suggests that the fate of the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) will be determined on the battlefields. Of course, this argument only further reinforces the ties between the ethnic nation and the state that was conducting the war. See Kamei Katsuichirō, “Gendai seishin ni kansuru oboegaki,” in Kawakami and Takeuchi, eds., *Kindai no chōkoku*, p. 17.

71. Kamei Katsuichirō, “Minzoku no giseisha: kokumin bungaku no juritsu e,” originally published in *Yomiuri shinbun*, February 28, 1941; reprinted in *Kamei Katsuichirō zen-shō*, Vol. 4, p. 323.

For romantics such as Kamei and Hayashi, the development of this national literature would enable the Japanese nation to shake off the debilitating effects of a cultural colonization by the West. Their reunification of state and nation was premised on the belief that the wartime Japanese state was well on its way toward “overcoming modernity.”

Other participants, such as Kobayashi Hideo, a leading literary critic, and Nakamura Mitsuo, professor of French literature at Tokyo Imperial University, expressed doubts as to whether Japan could ever “overcome modernity.” Yet, the willingness of the Romantics to believe that Japan could do so stemmed, at least in part, from their ultimate suspension of the separation between ethnic nation and state. Whether this was due to their forgetfulness of the artificial nature of the ethnic nation as their own representation, to their romantic conviction that the “nation” must be a coherent totality, or simply to a desperate hope that the Pacific War would liberate the Japanese people from Western cultural dominance matters very little: in either case, once the ethnic nation was superimposed on the state, whatever critical impulses it might have possessed earlier quickly gave way to a very effective, even if unintentional, support of the Japanese nation-state’s expansive policies in East Asia.

A Prospectus on Nationalism in Contemporary Japan

I suggested at the outset that a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple dimensions of Asian nationalism in general might begin with a reconsideration of the specific case of Japanese nationalism. At least since Japan’s military defeat of Russia in the early twentieth century, nationalists throughout Asia have often looked to Japan as a model for their own aspirations for nationalist liberation from Western colonialism. Some are again looking to Japan today as a possible new leader in Asia, after the presumed decline of U.S. influence in the Pacific. A closer look, however, at the various historical forms of nationalism in modern Japan, as I have tried to present them here, reveals some of the difficulties with this model of Japan as the “liberator of Asia.”

While much scholarly attention in the past has focused on the cause and effects of state nationalism in modern Japan, this essay has argued that much of the appeal of nationalism for many Japanese rested on a belief that the nation could also be reconceived as an ethnic people that might resist the exploitations of the Japanese people by their political elites carried out under the concept of the modern state. Such a belief carried with it the suggestion that Japanese nationalism might be relocated within a broader, Asian nationalist movement for liberation from Western imperialism, although invariably Japanese nationalism was to accept its historically fated position at the apex of Asian resistance against the West. That is to say, implicitly, and

at times explicitly, in this construction of Asian national liberation from the West there was a recognition of the presence of modernity within the Japanese state itself along with a very ambivalent attitude toward that modernity.

Ultimately, of course, attempts to escape such domestic oppression of the Japanese people by their modern, Western state by establishing some cultural relocation within a larger Asian whole exposed a paradoxical and painful awareness of the fact that cultural nationalism as well as the modern state had alienated Japan from the rest of Asia. The very fact that Japan, of all Asian nations, was the first to successfully construct an independent and powerful state also meant that Japan had internalized all the problems associated with other powerful modern states in the early twentieth century, as evidenced by Japan's own imperialism and colonization in Asia.

Romanticism was particularly appealing as a means of mediating the dilemma between East and West, tradition and modernity, for a variety of reasons. First, modern intellectuals such as Yasuda and his colleagues were quite aware that the very longing for cultural and ethnic identity was part and parcel of the modern world ("the eighteenth century") and therefore German romanticism could be effective, if not essential, in providing the necessary tools for producing an alternative concept of the nation around claims of ethnic similitude. The Japan Romantic School's astute grasp of "modernity" as a polysemic concept rife with internal contradictions surely grew out of its adherents' own experience as modern Japanese and attests to the modern nature of their own attempt to escape modernity. Second, the heightened awareness in romanticism of the process of representation and the gap between reality and representation offered a powerful intellectual tradition of subjectively producing through imaginative acts what modern reality seemed to foreclose. Third, German romanticism seemed to carry with it its own negation. By calling attention to the specificity of national experiences, German romanticism made possible the Japan Romantic School's eventual belief that the Japanese nation had "overcome" the modernity of the West and had envisioned a new cultural order that could be represented through the non-West. This required, however, a double irony of forgetting the specific conditions of the Romantics' own representation of "Japan," a forgetfulness that also collapsed any meaningful distinction between "ethnic" and "state" nationalisms.

In light of this history of a rather complicated relationship between ethnic and state nationalism in prewar Japanese history, it is reasonable to conclude that the problem of ethnic nationalism has not disappeared in the postwar period. Indeed, given the wealth of scholarly work on ethnic nationalism from the 1950s through the explosion of writings on *Nihonjinron* in the 1970s and 1980s, and the current resurgence of interest in ethnic nationalism that enveloped much of the globe after the dissolution of the Soviet

Union, it would seem that ethnic nationalism in Japan may have gained momentum in recent years.

Surely changes in postwar Japan need to be taken into account when assessing the specific lines of continuity in ethnic nationalist discourse in Japan today.⁷² Yet, in the last few decades, surprising continuities with the earlier discourse on ethnic nationalism have become apparent. In his socio-logical analysis of the literature on cultural nationalism (*Nihonjinron*) in postwar Japan, Kosaku Yoshino has demonstrated that a considerable body of this literature originates from and is supported by private businessmen and others who situate themselves outside the state.⁷³ And the legacy of an ethnic nationalism critical of the state seems to have survived on both ends of the political spectrum in the postwar period. Although politically at odds with each other, both right and left wings of the postwar ethnic nationalists share a common antagonism to the capitalist postwar Japanese state. As Ino Kenji (b. 1933), the “godfather” of the “right-wing ethnic nationalists,” declared, “We must completely reject everything the postwar era has given us—its culture and morals, the political parties, the new left, the established right wing, and of course, the constitution and the security treaty.” He added that “capitalism is also our enemy.”⁷⁴

Have the lessons of wartime militarism and statism yielded, not a resurgence of the exact same kind of prewar state nationalism among a more prosperous postwar generation, but a growing sense that it was state nationalism, not ethnic nationalism, that was discredited by the war and occupation? How have the experiences of foreign occupation and American cultural influence in the postwar years provided support for a sense of ethnic nationalism as rebellion against Western colonization? And is this ethnic nationalism again sliding quickly, almost effortlessly, into Nakasone’s renewed calls during the 1980s for an ethnic nation-state (*minzoku kokka*), with all the attendant problems this creates for the growing numbers of foreigners living in Japan? These questions will confront any attempt to understand the political possibilities of nationalism and the attempt to critically reexamine questions of culture, politics, and Asian identity as they are taking shape in Japan today.

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72. See Aoki Tamotsu, “*Nihon bunkaron*” *no henyō* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1990), especially his discussion on pp. 30–52 of how Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* helped invent a new tradition for postwar Japanese.

73. Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, esp. pp. 133–57.

74. Ino, “Uyoku minzoku-ha undō tenbō suru,” pp. 101–4.