

Illuminating the Meiji Restoration

Nation-state and proto-nationalism in 19th century Japan



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Introduction

It has become generally understood among scholars that the Japanese nationalist ideology was developed by the Meiji government during the Meiji Restoration of 1868, who used it to foster a sense of patriotism and national unity. During the Restoration, Western ideas and advancements were incorporated to rapidly modernize and industrialize Japan in order to be able to contend with the Western powers on an equal level: it was the process of strengthening Japan and restoring practical imperial rule.¹ This stance on the development of Japanese nationalism implies that it would not have developed in Japan had Commodore Matthew C. Perry not arrived in 1853. It also portrays it in the modernist view as an ideological construction, where its development was made possible through the creation of a industrial economy, a central supreme authority and a central language during the Meiji Restoration², implying in turn there had been no Japanese national consciousness before that time. However, the existence of various national movements and national modes of thought led to the growth of a Japanese national consciousness during the latter decades of Tokugawa era of Japan (1800-1868), better known as the Edo period, showing that there had been at least some form of a singular national identity in Japan at this time.

In this regard, it is my aim in this paper to research to what extent a national consciousness existed before the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and how this was developed and expressed. Given the above observations, I will, for example, discuss to what extent Edo Japan can be considered a modern nation-state before the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and to what degree proto-nationalist sentiments had been institutionalized in Edo society. For the purpose of this paper, the focus of my research will be on the samurai class, where literacy ratings were by far the highest in all of Japan at the time and the most likely place where a “Japanese” consciousness started to develop. Part of this research will be based on the sayings and teachings in the works of various intellectuals of Edo Japan written between 1760 and 1825: Volume 6 of Motoori Norinaga's complete works (the True Tradition of the Sun Goddess), Volume 1 of Hirata Atsutane's complete works (The True Meaning of the Ancient Way) and Aizawa Seishisai's *Shinron*. I chose these works and intellectuals because they are the most viable concerning my research. As the historical context of these works is central to this research, my analysis will focus on the historical influences on the writer as well as determining the goal of these works. As primary sources outside the intellectual climate of Edo Japan are hard to come by, my research will mainly be based on secondary literature written by contemporary scholars and experts: on more than one occasion some form of overview needs to be provided. Additionally, I will also discuss two known theories on nationalism.

In order to find a satisfying answer with regard to the main question, I will first attempt to shed

¹ Library of Congress Country Studies – Japan, 'The Meiji-Restoration' (January 1994) [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+jp0035\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+jp0035)) (May 17, 2015).

² A.D. Smith, “Memory and modernity: reflections on Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism”, *Nations and Nationalism, Vol. 2 (3)* (1996), 374.

some light on what exactly constitutes the “Japanese identity”, as it largely determines where and how proto-nationalist sentiments are expressed. One decisive factor is the social structure, as this largely determined the interaction between classes and government in feudal Japan. A second is the limited worldview Japan had for a long time: it only had a positive interaction with China and Korea, two countries that did not differ much in terms of thought and views. Of these two, China has had by far the most influence on the growth of Japanese culture. In addition, the West has also played a part in the formation of a specific Japanese identity due to contact between the two regions across centuries, at least since the seventeenth century. As such, the first chapter will look at the social structure as well as foreign influences in the creation of the Japanese identity.

In the second chapter I will look at the degree to which Edo Japan can be regarded as a modern nation-state. The Meiji-Restoration had facilitated the transformation from a feudal state to a nation-state; however, such a statement ignores the complexity of the Japanese feudal system of the time and as such warrants some discussion. Here our main understanding of the concept will be discussed and how pre-modern Japan fits into it. This will be done by discussing the various criteria that have been set for the nation-state and compare these criteria to the realities of feudal organization.

In the third chapter I will discuss proto-nationalism as a concept and where expressions as such are most likely to be found. As the main research focus of the paper lies with the *daimyo* and the samurai class, both the intellectual climate of Edo Japan and philosophical thought will be discussed, as well as the *Han*-domains.³ I chose the intellectual climate since many samurai have turned to bureaucrats, administrators and scholars during the peace time under the Tokugawa-government, and the *Han*-domains because it was ultimately an alliance of these that brought down the last vestiges of Tokugawa-government.

In the fourth and final chapter I will take a broader look on the process of “pre-modern nationalisation” and attempt to explain it at the hands of the theories on nationalism of Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith. As the previous chapters will demonstrate, there were factors that both facilitated and prohibited the growth of a national consciousness. In light of these factors, I chose the theory of B. Anderson because these factors, namely the social structure, print culture and intellectual climate, are main components in his thesis. However, the theory of Anderson would not be enough, as religion and myths also played central roles; factors that are aptly discussed in Smith's theory. Additionally, some additional theory behind the concepts of the “Other” and the “Self” as propagated by scholars such as E. Said and how these came into being will be provided. Lastly, my findings will be summarized in a final conclusion and provide an answer to the main question posed at the start of this preface, as well as provide some form of closing statement.

By focusing on these four subjects – determining the Japanese identity, the degree to which Edo Japan can be considered a nation-state, locating proto-nationalism in Edo society and applying known

³ The *daimyo* were the feudal lords of the various domains in Edo Japan, called the *han*. This was a term adopted from Chinese culture and signifies a specific domainal identity, such as Chōshū, Satsuma or Mito.

theories on nationalism to Japan – I will attempt to discern a process of nationalisation that supports the possibility of a national consciousness being present before 1868.

The relevance of this paper does not lie within a radical expansion of existing knowledge or the solving of difficult questions. Rather, by using existing knowledge, it attempts to establish different connections between known information on nationalist sentiments in nineteenth century Japan. Through this, I attempt to clarify matters that have not yet been thoroughly researched, such as the pre-modern Japanese identity and the role of an “Other” in the emergence of pre-modern nationalism. Most intellectuals have focused on expanding the knowledge of that which is already known, such as the role of the intellectual Yoshida Shoin in the national movement, or the rebellions of the Choshu and Satsuma-*han* in the 1850's and 1860's. They mainly want to explain the Meiji-Restoration in greater detail.⁴ My research goes back further, towards the period between the 1800's and the Meiji-Restoration, and focuses on expanding the knowledge of the ongoing process of nationalisation predating the Restoration on various levels. It is the aim of this paper to (1) prove that some form of national consciousness existed before the Meiji-Restoration of 1868; (2) demonstrate that the typical modernist view alone on the emergence of nationalism in pre-Meiji Japan is insufficient; (3) provide a nuanced view of Edo Japan, other than the ruling view of it as isolationist, stagnant and a backwater country and (4) explain that a free intellectual climate made it possible for nationalist sentiments to come into being and spread effectively. Now, let's take a look at Edo Japan's nationalisation.

1. Illuminating the Japanese identity

One of the accepted views among scholars is that the Japanese never had any cause to consider what it meant to be Japanese until the few years before the Meiji Restoration, where increased contact with the West and the forced opening of Japan to the West formed grounds for it to determine what it exactly meant to be Japanese.⁵ In this section I aim to contest this view and demonstrate that nationalist ideas and sentiments already existed before the Meiji Restoration took place in 1868. In discussing the social structure and foreign influences during the later decades of Edo Japan I will demonstrate that, despite the massive cultural heterogeneity, there was a basis for the development of a national consciousness. First, a brief overview of the Japanese social structure will be provided. Second, a closer look will be taken at the importance of Chinese influences. Third, the effects that the prolonged contact with the West has had on the formation of a Japanese identity, up to the arrival of the U.S. Commodore M.C. Perry in 1853, will be discussed. Lastly, my findings will be summed up and explain what it exactly meant to be Japanese in Edo Japan.

4 For example, see M. Hane and L.G. Perez. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Westview Press 2013). This is well-written book that provides both an overview of Edo Japan and explains the multitude of factors that led to the Meiji-Restoration.

5 V. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830. Volume 2: Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands* (Cambridge 2009), 489-490.

1.1 Social Structure of Edo Japan

In late Edo Japan, there existed a distinguished and well-organized social order that had been established at the start of the seventeenth century. Society was purposefully divided into various classes in order to prevent rebellion or the rise of nationalist sentiments.⁶ From top to bottom, these were the Imperial Court, the Samurai, the farmers, the townsmen and the subcastes⁷. First, there is the Imperial Court, consisting of the Emperor and the ruling family; case in point being the ruling Tokugawa-family. Life at court centered around almost 200 daily ceremonies, from poetry to flowers and incense burning; it was the heart of Japanese culture in the Edo-era. The emperor himself symbolized tradition and legitimacy, and was the head of the most powerful group in Japan.⁸ His influence was mostly symbolical, however; the *bakufu*⁹ held practical political power. Second, there is the ruling class of the samurai. This warrior class was exempt from active participation in Edo society to pursue morality and serve as an ideal type for the rest of society. They always had to serve their masters (*daimyo*) faithfully and focused on their own virtue, effectively giving them a moral and ethical role rather than a productive one¹⁰. In the late Edo-era there were no battles to be fought, however, and most samurai turned into administrators, scholars and officials in order to still be useful to society. Third in terms of importance were the farmers, who made life and progress in society possible. They produced rice, hemp, grains and other consumables, and mirrored the success or failure of government; if they did not produce enough food and goods, it was a sign of governmental weakness¹¹. Fourth were the townsmen: merchants and artisans. A further distinction has to be made here, as in Japan the merchants were considered to be serving only their own interests rather than those of society, as the samurai, farmers and artisans did. They were held considerably in lower regard compared to the artisans; they were mostly tolerated because they were deemed necessary for society as they provided trade and wealth. Last, the subcastes (prostitutes, butchers and leather tanners) were discriminated openly as they did not live their life in line with Buddhist sensitivities; they violated its principles on a daily basis.

Such a hierarchical social system as described above did not leave much room for social advancement, and poses several problems. In this social environment it would be difficult for any kind of national consciousness to develop, as communication between both class and *han* was deliberately made difficult by the government.¹² The social structure under feudalist Edo Japan eroded the national spirit, and the attitudes that ruled the nation were fear and suspicion, creating strong personal

6 M. Maruyama, *Studies in the intellectual history of Tokugawa Japan* (University of Tokyo Press 1952), 330-332.

7 M.B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Harvard 2000) 97.

8 B.J. McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity* (Maryland 2006) 43.

9 The ruling government consisting of the *Shogun* and his household. Whereas the Emperor was the symbolic ruler of Edo Japan, absolute political power rested with the *Shogun*.

10 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 101-103.

11 *Ibidem*, 111.

12 Maruyama, *Studies in the intellectual history of Tokugawa Japan*, 330-333.

barriers within class and *han* alike. In general, the Japanese treated and viewed each other as foreigners.¹³ As long as these barriers under the feudalist system remained, it would not be possible for some form of national consciousness to develop.

Edo Japan was strongly heterogenous on influential and personal levels, and the social barriers were strong. And yet, the Japanese language was accessible to all, the practice of Japanese culture had only minor deviations and all held the same regard for tradition. To each member of society, Japanese history was an important point of reference as it held the traditions, customs and divisions that justified the Tokugawa society as it was at any particular time. Loyalty to the Emperor was a powerful element of Edo Japan: he remained the central symbol of tradition and legitimacy and his position could “easily lend itself to a modern reconstruction in terms of nationalism”.¹⁴ The Royal Court and the Emperor were held in high regard by every member of society, regardless of rank or status, and were of equal importance to all in Tokugawa Japan.

1.2. Influences of China

As nationalism often arises when a certain populace finds itself under pressure from foreign influences or pressure, threatening their communal or national identity¹⁵, it is at the very least necessary to look at the influences and pressures China exerted on Edo Japan. Over the course of centuries, China has been regarded by Japan as the very model of civilization, the highest form of civilization to which a country could aspire.¹⁶ As such, Japan has always sought to emulate the Chinese in forms of government, philosophy and culture. It is through this admiration that Confucianism and Buddhism entered Japanese culture and thought, while still maintaining the practice of Shinto and Bushido which were already firmly established as philosophical traditions. William G. Beasley, a well known Japanologist in academic circles, proposed a thesis in which he claims that even before 1868, there existed a specific set of assumptions about what constituted “Japaneseness”.¹⁷ In this thesis, he looks (among other things) at the influence China had on Edo-Japan, arguing that while this influence was great, there already were certain traditions that were Japanese in character. He writes:

“(…) one feature of Edo society was the capacity of Chinese and Japanese traditions to co-exist. Beside Buddhism stood Shinto, beside Confucianism, Bushido. Painting had both Chinese and Japanese styles. Poetry was written in both languages. (...) Chinese was the language of most government documents, Japanese served for the more popular forms of prose.”¹⁸

13 Maruyama, *Studies in the intellectual history of Tokugawa Japan*, 331.

14 D. Rothermund, 'Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Traditions in Asia', in: Kuhnt-Saptodewo, S., Grabowsky, V. and Großheim, M. ed., *Nationalism and Cultural Revival in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Centre and the Region* (Wiesbaden 1997), 24.

15 Gat, A. and Yakobson, A. *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge 2013), 107.

16 Rothermund, 'Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Traditions in Asia', 24.

17 W.G. Beasley, 'The Edo Experience and Japanese Nationalism', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1984) 556.

18 Beasley, 'The Edo Experience and Japanese Nationalism', 557.

With this observation, it is important to note that while these traditions co-existed in Tokugawa Japan, at certain points these traditions were conflicting with each other. As such, it was necessary to find some form of accommodation between them if they were to continue existing side by side. Beasley notes the adoption of Neo-Confucianism as the social ethic among samurai as one of the most important examples. This ideology reinforced social and political stability, and basically converted the samurai in Tokugawa Japan from warriors to bureaucrats. The coexistence of two modes of thought, Confucianism (The Way of Heaven) and Shinto (Way of the Gods) would eventually clash, as these two modes of thought differed in respect to the position of the ruler. While in Confucianism the ruler was expected to rule by virtue and legitimised by the Mandate of Heaven, he could be removed from his position if he ruled in a manner that was detrimental to society. In Shinto the Emperor derived his legitimacy from his divine ancestry, the *kami* (gods), and the people could never forget to act as subjects, regardless of how unreasonable or despotic he was.¹⁹ These two traditions coexisted and even reinforced one another for a long time, and some intellectuals throughout the years would continue to attempt to bring the two traditions together while others inclined towards one or the other, and proclaimed its superiority. This divergence would be most clear from the start of the 19th century to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, where the decline of the Tokugawa and increased pressure from the West gave rise to different ideas about Japan and its institutions.

Furthermore, those that effectively ruled in Japan were the *daimyo* and *samurai* rather than the Emperor. As such, the ideology could never align with the political realities in Japan.²⁰ In the eighteenth century these difficulties led to the complete rejection of the Chinese tradition by some in Japan, resulting in the fairly known National Learning-movement, known as *Kokugaku*. This movement will be discussed in further detail in the third chapter. Two things are important to note here. The first is that these developments resulted in an increased awareness of Japanese cultural distinctiveness. The second is that the Confucian tradition became more or less fragmented, with some following the tradition and others rejecting it. Those that chose to follow it, mostly well-educated members of the samurai class, changed it into something that was markedly Japanese in character and would later be defended by Japanese nationalists.

1.3. Prolonged Contact with the West

Contact between Western countries and Japan is not new: for centuries the two regions have committed long distance trade. With a designated port in Nagasaki, the Netherlands is one of the more privileged countries in trading with Japan. Since the eighteenth century (possibly even earlier) Western ideas, technologies and values have entered Edo Japan through trade. In the field of the sciences and medicine we even find a degree of admiration, even among those who rejected the

19 D.M. Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan: Political Thinkers of the Tokugawa Period* (Washington 1964) 12.

20 Beasley, 'The Edo Experience and Japanese Nationalism', 558.

influence of other Western countries. This admiration and/or appreciation resulted in the adaptation of *rangaku* (Western learning): the Dutch language was studied in order to improve contact and relations with the Dutch, and there was a strong interest in learning Western medicine as expressed by Hirata Atsutane²¹, a samurai scholar who would be instrumental in the spread of nationalist ideas. I will discuss this influential person in the third chapter. Additionally, mathematics and astronomy increasingly became subjects of study. The relationship between the two countries was, suffice to say, quite a positive one. Rather than rejecting all Western ideas, some were appreciated by the Japanese, resulting in adaptation and a degree of scientific progress²². At the very worst, relations were neutral.

This was not to say that the general view of the West was a positive one: the Dutch were a clear exception in this. Additionally, although the Opium Wars of 1842 in China was not a case of direct contact between the West and Edo Japan, it did force the Japanese to reassert some of their ideas on the Western world.²³ The Opium Wars, which China decidedly lost, showcased the aggression and imperialism of the West. This event resulted in the fall (in the eyes of the Japanese) of the supposed model and pinnacle of civilization; it was a clear sign that the strength of the Western military was not to be underestimated. Through these wars, several trade ports in China were forcefully opened, the country was forced to pay millions in silver in reparations for Western losses, Hong Kong seceded as a gesture of Chinese good faith and Westerners, even military, could come and go as they pleased. It was a humiliating defeat. I explain the above because this occurrence effectively changed not only the Japanese view of the West and China, but that of the surrounding world. They realised their own weakness when compared to the West and had to find a new model. In a sense, through the Opium Wars, the focus of superiority was shifted towards Japan: as the successor of China, it had to prove its capabilities²⁴. As a result, the general literate population of Japan was (possibly) more receptive of nationalist ideas and anti-Western sentiment grew.

This anti-western sentiment was only to increase, as a little more than ten years later the American Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived in Japan in 1853 with three black frigates behind him, demanding permission to present a letter from president Millard Fillmore. The Japanese demanded in turn that he leave, but he refused. In fact, he ordered his men to bombard several buildings in the Uraga harbor that lay ahead. The Japanese finally acquiesced and took the presidential letter. Perry returned a year later and had found that the Japanese had prepared a treaty where all demands made by president Millard Fillmore had been met. This effectively opened up Japan to American trade and had made an end to the seclusionist policy it had adhered to for centuries. As will be shown later, it increased the national awareness of Japan and thinking in geographical terms (as in borders); this

21 Hirata Atsutane *Zenshu*, Kodo Taii, I, 53. Quoted in: WM.T. De Bary ed. *Sources of the Japanese Tradition, Vol. II* (Columbia 1958) 41.

22 Hirata Atsutane *Zenshu*, Kodo Taii, I, 53.

23 Beasley, 'The Edo Experience and Japanese Nationalism', 559.

24 Rothermund, 'Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Traditions in Asia', 24.

eventually resulted in the creation of two separate national flags. One for Japan and one for the *bakufu*.²⁵ The foreign policy of Japan had to change, and eventually two different sides emerged, leading to disagreement on which course to follow.²⁶ Lastly, it strongly increased anti-Western sentiments as Commodore Perry had shown to not have any regard or respect for the Japanese.

What does this all mean regarding the national Japanese identity? It infers that it should not be sought in conflicting ideologies, differences of political opinion or personal chances in life. Rather, what it means to be Japanese is located in adherence to tradition, culture, morality and the centrality of Japan's history in daily life. As such, in this case the expression of a singular Japanese “national” identity can be found in ethics, values and tradition, rather than politics.

2. Edo Japan: A Nation state

The nation state is not a purely Western phenomenon: in the 19th century nationalism was a global phenomenon and came into being around the same way it did in Europe. As such, our understanding of nationalism as a phenomenon is lacking as it is usually described as something the West exported to the rest of the world.²⁷ In this chapter an attempt will be made to remedy this (insofar my knowledge on the subject permits) and argue that Edo Japan had been a nation state in many respects before the Meiji-Restoration took place. First, some of the theory behind the idea of the nation-state and its understanding as something that could have come into being exclusively in the West will be discussed. Second, an overview of the general conditions a country has to fulfill if it is to fit in the conceptual framework will be provided. Third and last, the former will be used to show that Edo Japan, to a large extent, qualified as a nation state before the 1850's.

2.1 What is considered a nation-state?

The nation-state, or the modern nation, as a concept is highly multifaceted. According to Anthony D. Smith, not only is it the conglomeration of the concepts of “nation” and “state”, terms such as “sovereignty” and “legitimacy” are also interwoven.²⁸ Let us first take a look at these terms separately.

The concept of the nation is usually linked to an ethnic community, or *ethnie*.²⁹ More often than not, it attributes great value to having shared mythical origins and descent, a common history, a distinctive culture, shared territorial association and lastly a sense of group solidarity. It is an impersonal and distinctive community that is aware of its coherence and own interests.³⁰ The state, on the other hand, is defined as an organized political community living under one government.

25 Beasley, 'The Edo Experience and Japanese Nationalism', 560. **See also:** T. Chushichi, *The Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan 1825-1995* (Oxford 2000) 48.

26 M. Hane and L.G. Perez. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Westview Press 2013) 65.

27 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford 2004), 202-205.

28 A.D. Smith, *The antiquity of nations*, 129.

29 A.D. Smith, *The antiquity of nations*, 42.

30 A.C. Pick, 'The Nation State' (March 2011) <http://www.thenationstate.co.uk/TheNationState.pdf> (May 16, 2015) 5.

Sovereignty is widely regarded as the full right and power of a governing body to govern itself without outside interference or bodies. It has various subtypes, but in general it refers to countries being able to make its own decisions in various fields and subjects of governance. Lastly, legitimacy has both political and moral meaning. Politically, it constitutes the popular acceptance of authority and refers to a certain system of government within a specified area. Morally, it is something that is conferred to the governing body, based on the belief that the actions of the government are acceptable uses of power by a legally constituted government.³¹

Added together, we have a myriad of conditions that a country has to fulfill in order to be considered a nation state. Moreover, when looking back at the above definitions of the various concepts, there is one aspect that is specifically Western in character: that of legitimacy.³² While the general understanding of the nation and the state is purely descriptive, and sovereignty speaks of capabilities, legitimacy is the only concept that grants the people not only an amount of responsibility but also power. If we follow the definition of “legitimacy”, it is by the will of the people that a government is able to govern. From this we can conclude that the nation state, through legitimacy, is expressly given a Western character, making it all the more difficult for Non-European countries to claim to be nation states. However, this does not mean it cannot apply to non-Western states, as we shall see below.

2.2 Conditions of the nation-state.

In our modern understanding of the concept of the nation-state, there are certain conditions that are to be met if one is to describe a specific country as a nation-state.³³ First, territory has to be non-transferable: in other words, geographical borders (internal and external) have to be permanently set and not moveable at the hands of the government or a specific lord. Second, the country needs to have an established border for the area of settlement, as described above. Third, the state needs to be regarded as an instrument for national unity in terms of economic, social and cultural life. Fourth, the people inside its borders need to have (and be aware of) a specific national identity. Fifth, there needs to be a uniform national culture within the country's borders. Sixth, the people need to have a uniform national language, one that everybody speaks and understands. Seventh, the state itself needs to be sovereign so that it is free to govern without external influence, as well as possess legitimate rule.

31 Pick, 'The Nation State', 5-6.

32 I view the concept of 'legitimacy' here as Western since it incorporates a separation of government and government, as well as the existence of independent institutions and legal bodies that act as intermediaries: something which Europe was to do as one of the first, if not the first, regions. This gives them a specific Western character. Additionally, these bodies and institutions also serve to guarantee the rights of the governed when conflict with the government arises. **See also:** B. Gilley, 'The meaning and measure of state legitimacy: Results for 72 countries', in: *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 45 (2006), 500-501.

33 During my research on this subject, it has become increasingly clear that there is little consensus on a singular meaning of the “nation-state”, since many scholars have different ideas on what constitutes the nation and the state. Accordingly, defining the nation-state is just as elusive. As such, I decided to look for similarities in the various ideas on the nation and the state of B. Anderson, A.D. Smith and A.C. Pick. For example, see: A.D. Smith, *The antiquity of nations* (Cambridge 2004), 129 and on; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London 1983), 6; and A.C. Pick, 'The Nation State', 5-6.

Now, as one may notice, the fact that a nation-state needs to have legitimacy seems to pose a problem for its application to Edo Japan, as the concept is ingrained in both the definition of the nation-state as well as its conditions. Additionally, the fact that Japan in this era had a feudal system of government does not seem to help in the least. However, it can be argued that Edo Japan is still legitimate in the sense that it had an emperor that formed the very center of society as the concept contains the acceptance of authority as well as a popular belief in the just application of power by the government. While the effective government (*bakufu*) and symbolic rule (the Emperor) coexisted, and both had a different degree of power and influence, the emperor was a unifying factor. Commoner, samurai, daimyo and bakufu all held the same regard for the Emperor. Additionally, while he had little actual political power at the time, he was seen as the symbol of both divinity and wisdom, and the government relied on him as he was the only one who could increase /decrease the prestige and power of the Han-domains. All looked to the emperor for guidance and prestige, resulting in a large degree of acceptance of authority and a belief in a just application of power by the government, effectively resulting in legitimacy. It has to be said, however, that it does not match the definition exactly, as the basis of the emperor's legitimacy was not legal but divine by nature. That said, it is clear that legitimacy does not need to have a legal basis; it is a matter of the governed believing in the government.

2.3 Japanese Nation, Feudal State.

Having looked more into what defines a nation-state and the problems that accompany its application to Edo Japan, it is now a good time to determine how much of a nation-state Japan was in the 19th century. In this section I will apply the various conditions to the political, social and cultural realities of the country, thereby making a strong case for the view of Edo Japan as a pre-modern nation-state.

First off, it needs to be said that it was a state in terms of a singular political system and established geopolitical borders, and a nation in terms of shared ethnicity and culture: as described in the first chapter, Japan at this time had a largely homogenous ethnicity and one uniform culture. It had established geographical borders as well as one central administrative government, the *bakufu*³⁴. Second, the feudalism in Edo Japan differed of that in the West in medieval times, as the taxability of the lords of the domains was not measured in land but in *koku*, an amount of rice necessary to support one person over the course of a year.³⁵ The domains themselves had borders, but there was only one master of the land and that was the shogun: the residents of the domain only worked the land and never owned it. On occasion certain domains gained new masters, but only as punitive measures. The land itself was never transferred as a political measure to another sovereignty³⁶, thereby meeting the criteria of non-transferable territory to a large degree. Third, Edo Japan had clearly established

34 M. Hane and L.G. Perez, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Westview Press 2013), 317-323.

35 Howell, D.L. *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (California Press 2005) 22-23.

36 Hane and Perez, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*, 319.

borders, thereby meeting the second criteria. Fourth, there was a singular political system in the *bakufu*, which maintained one central economy. Through tradition and intellectual thought, there were set social rules and one culture. Fifth, a specific Japanese national identity had been present by the 1850's, located in the respect for tradition, history and the divine nature of the Emperor.³⁷ Sixth, as explained in the fourth point, a single culture was present through the Royal Court. Seventh, there was a single (national) language in Edo Japan: Japanese. While Chinese was often used for governmental documents, Japanese was a language that everyone could (partially) read, write, speak and understand: it was the language of everyday life. Lastly, Edo Japan was sovereign as it was free to govern its own country without external interference. This may seem contradictory with the events of 1853, but one needs to keep in mind that Japan was never effectively colonized. Additionally, before that time Japan had always been successful in managing its isolationist policy of *sankoku*³⁸.

By now it should be more than clear that Edo Japan could be considered a nation-state. Despite the fact that the conditions of non-transferable territory and legitimacy may not seem wholly unambiguous in this particular case, one can do little but agree that it did come very close to the conceptual nation-state. As a result it can be concluded that the Meiji-Restoration did not turn Japan into a nation-state; it only furthered an already existing process. Here I say furthered, since one of the aforementioned problem was that of legitimate rule on a legal basis (a constitution), and while Meiji Japan did have representative government starting from 1868, it did not adopt a constitution until 1889. Additionally, although there was the Charter Oath of April 7, 1868, it cannot be said to provide a sufficient legal basis for legitimacy.

3. Origins of Proto-Nationalism in Japan

So far we have discussed the political and social structure of Edo Japan, as well as attempted to depict the country as a nation-state so as to prove that, despite the feudal characteristics of Edo Japan, the country came surprisingly close to being a nation-state and thereby "modernity". In this chapter the third step in my research on the supposed revolutionary character of the Meiji-Restoration will be discussed: proto-nationalism and its role in paving the way for this revolution. First, the concept of proto-nationalism will be briefly discussed and the central criteria of that concept. Second, following these criteria, the existence of proto-nationalism in Edo Japan will be demonstrated by looking at manifestations of it in the intellectual climate of the country. Here an emphasis will be placed on the role of three individuals that have been instrumental for these manifestations and their spread. Third, the presence of proto-nationalist sentiments within the Han-domains will be discussed. In the final

³⁷ This national identity can be found within the *Kokugaku*-teachings and the life of Yoshida Shoin, an intellectual of samurai birth (1830-1859). He transformed the people's faith in the Emperor and resentment over the failure of the government to deal effectively with the barbarians into action, leading the way to the Meiji-Restoration. **See:** H.D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Japan* (University of California Press 1970), 190 and on.

³⁸ *Sankoku* refers to the isolationist policy that the Tokugawa government had adopted since the seventeenth century, prohibiting the entry of foreign vessels and traders to a few ports in Japan. Until Perry's arrival in 1853, it remained in effect.

section of this chapter I will summarize what has been discussed and provide a link to the next chapter.

3.1 Defining Proto-Nationalism

When focusing on the modern understanding of the concept of nationalism, we find that it is commonly understood as the desire for some form of ethnic or civic unity in the face of a certain threat, dubbed the “Other”.³⁹ Additionally, it can be understood as a desire to preserve of one's national identity and to achieve some form of self-determination. Considering this, it can be said that it is an ideology that requires action of its followers and focuses on feelings of belonging, which in turn partially explains its wide range of appeal.

According to the late political scientist Eric Hobsbawm, proto-nationalism is an early stage of nationalism that emerges from popular roots and supports a certain “national idea”. He describes four criteria that can create a sense of community: religion, ethnicity, language and a common government.⁴⁰ First, there is the criteria of religion. As described earlier, Edo Japan had several co-existing philosophies and modes of thought: Confucianism, Shinto, Buddhism and Bushido. Although in the beginning of the Edo Period in the seventeenth century these philosophies managed to coexist (and even blend), in the second half of the eighteenth century the philosophies of Confucianism started to clash and eventually the land was divided between the supremacy of either the one or the other. Despite this development, it will be shown that a level of proto-nationalist thought would emerge from Shinto and spread throughout Edo Japan in the first section. This mode of thought would bind members of different classes together and foster an increasing national Japanese awareness, thereby creating some sense of community. Combined with the arrival of Matthew Perry, it would even lead to the use of flags, an important sign of proto nationalism.⁴¹ Second, there is the matter of ethnicity. As described before, Edo Japan was highly homogenous at the ethnic level. Some minorities existed, such as the Ainu of Northern Japan, but in these cases the Japanese tended to stress similarities rather than differences, thus keeping the country mostly ethnically uniform. Central to the homogeneity of ethnicity here was the role of the Emperor and the common history of the Japanese; in other words, it was more a matter of culture than genetics. This too is linked to the intellectual climate and philosophies of Edo Japan. Third, there is the matter of language. Despite the co-existence of two different “national” languages there was one language that everyone spoke and understood: Japanese. Although it can be described as a lesser language considering the classes that used it (Chinese was mainly the language of the elite and the government) it would have a unifying function from the start of the nineteenth century and onwards. Fourth and last, there is the case of the common government.

39 The concept of the “Other” has been used and discussed through the years in the fields of, amongst others, continental philosophy and anthropology. Scholars and intellectuals such as G.W.F. Hegel and E. Said have discussed the concept of the Other in various works. “Othering” is, in general, a process of dehumanising someone who is perceivably different. For a more in-depth analysis of the concept, see P. Jemmer, ‘The O(the)r O(the)r’, in: *Café Philosophique: A Season of “The Other”* (September 2009), 7-9.

40 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge 1990) 48-cont.

41 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 50.

Hobsbawm describes it as “the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity”.⁴² He describes it as a nationalism of the nobility, as this sense of belonging would usually be found only among the higher classes, the aristocracy. However, due to the disparities in position among the ruling samurai class, this logic is not so easily applied to Japan: there were more impoverished samurai than wealthy ones, who would have had difficulties surviving due to their low amount of *koku*.⁴³ As a result, some would have a strong sense of belonging to the Tokugawa leadership while others would not. The one entity the Japanese people as a whole would feel any belonging to was the Emperor, who did have a small degree of political power and whose authority was (in the eyes of the Japanese) everlasting.

As such, for the sake of the argument, I will use the Japanese emperor as a source of nationalist sentiments, as described earlier.

More often than not these attributes bind a people together in opposition to a nearby “Other”. In the case of Japan, these can entail followers of a different philosophy, the government, a different Han-domain or foreigners. As a concept, then, proto-nationalism focuses mainly on creating sense of community and a certain “national idea”, in which the former is basically about creating a group identity/mentality and the latter implicates that some form of borders are established. The self-styled definition I aim to use for this paper, then, is as follows:

“Proto-nationalism is an early stage of nationalism that can emerge from opposition to an “Other”, and focuses on establishing a specific group identity to foster a sense of belonging through which borders are created, consciously or inadvertently.”

When discussing the influence and emergence of different philosophical ideas or political/cultural expressions about what constitutes the Japanese nation, I will use this definition of proto-nationalism to argue for the existence of such sentiments in Edo Japan. To start, I will discuss its intellectual origins below.

3.2 Intellectual Origins: Intellectual Freedom, Literacy, National Learning and the Mito School.

When scholars think about Japan in the Tokugawa era, the words “isolationist” and “stagnation” usually come to mind. However, this period in the history of Japan has been one of exceptional growth in many different fields. Commercial and agricultural growth had been tremendous and urbanization laid the foundation for, amongst others, nationwide trade. The emergence of a market economy and increased urbanization, in turn, led to a transformation of intellectual life: knowledge that had only been limited to specialists was now widely available to anyone in Japan, and literacy spread widely enough to foster

⁴² Ibidem, 73.

⁴³ Jansen, *Making of Modern Japan*, 105.

commercial publishing.⁴⁴

This dispersal of learning had three important effects: (1) it countered the medieval assumption that public knowledge was superficial and knowledge was increasingly sanctioned as it relied on authentic canonised texts; (2) knowledge was expected to have some practical use and (3) the intellectual scene that was created became a battlefield for social capital: engaging in some form of intellectual activity was practically an obligatory aspect in the life of wealthier circles, regardless of class.⁴⁵ In this section I will argue that this rather free intellectual climate fostered a freedom through which different ideas on a variety of subjects could be shared, and eventually nationalist ideas from among various great thinkers of the time. The main focus will be placed on Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) and Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863) respectively.

3.2.1 Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801)

Motoori Norinaga was born the son of a merchant house, but his talent was such that he managed to climb up to the position of scholar. He started to analyze the *Kojiki*, one of the classics of Japanese literature, in 1764. A striking fact is that his around 500 students were composed of priests, commoners, peasants, court nobility, merchants and samurai.⁴⁶ This gave him both wide popular and scholastic appeal. In his study of the classic he expounded his idea of the Ancient Way, which had a strong emphasis on the emperor's inviolable position and absolute authority. His works mostly serve to elucidate this position and include frequent attacks on Confucianism, while at the same time emphasizing the inherent superiority of Japan. His ideas are best summed up in the following quote:

“In China and other countries the “heavenly Emperor” is worshiped as the supreme divinity. (...) They are merely man-made designations and the “Heavenly Ruler” or the “Heavenly Way” have no real existence at all. (...) ours is the native land of the Heaven-Shining Goddess who casts her light over all countries in the four seas. Thus our country is the source and fountainhead of all other countries, and in all matters it excels all the others.”⁴⁷

One of the keys of his teachings lies in his identification of the Ancient Way (Way of Japan) with the existing feudal system of Japan and Amaterasu's instructions. In other words: to follow the Ancient Way, and with that the existing feudal system, lay at the heart of being Japanese. Additionally he

44 A. Beerens and M. Teeuwen. *Uncharted Waters: Intellectual Life in the Edo Period* (Boston 2012) 1.

45 Beerens and Teeuwen, *Uncharted Waters*, 2.

46 Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan*, 69.

47 *Motoori Norinaga Zenshu*, VI, 36. Quoted in: W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition, Vol. II*, 17-18. Throughout this work, he separates the rationalist Chinese and spiritual Japanese thought, rejecting the former. He stresses the centrality and uniqueness of Japan, promulgating its divine nature. His focus on the *Kojiki* clearly influenced this line of thought, as in this work an emphasis was placed on the creation of the gods and the mythical foundation of Japan. The work was written across the second half of the eighteenth century, when famines, economic problems and peasant uprisings reigned. It is likely that Norinaga was influenced by these proceedings and attempted to prevent the Japanese identity from falling apart. For a more in-depth background, see M. Hane and L.G. Perez. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Westview Press 2013), 39 and on.

insisted on the indivisibility of the nation.⁴⁸ It is clear that he, through his teachings and convictions, created a sense of what it meant to be Japanese as well as fostered a sense of community through indivisibility. He was a central figure in the *Kokugaku* (National Learning) movement, which would continue for years. This movement would be popularized in the 19th century under Hirata Atsutane.

3.2.2 Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843)

Born as the son of a low ranking samurai, he investigated the writings of Motoori Norinaga in 1801 and expanded Norinaga's philosophy.⁴⁹ More than anything, he explored the political importance of Norinaga's studies and was known as a Shinto reformer. He never had the chance to study under Norinaga himself, but this motivated him all the more. He devoted himself to the study of the Ancient Way and became a leading disciple of Norinaga's teachings. By 1808, his fame had become so great that his work became orthodox and, as such, had widespread influence. His tradition of Shinto became supreme over all other religions and branches of learning; however, his work was at times fantastic and irrational. Then again, this could be just more appealing to followers of the Ancient Way and the Japanese Spirit. Atsutane saw Japan as follows:

“(...) our country, as a special mark of favor from the heavenly gods, was begotten by them, and there is thus so immense a difference between Japan and all the other countries of the world as to defy comparison. Ours is a splendid and blessed country, the Land of the Gods beyond any doubt, and we, down to the most humble man and woman, are the descendants of the gods.”⁵⁰

Here, again we see an enforcement of the supremacy of Japan. However, by their very simplicity they were instrumental in the arousal of a national consciousness among the Japanese. They worked on the emotions and by incorporating the humble commoner in his teachings he won many adherents among the more simple minded peasants and commoners.⁵¹ More so than Norinaga, he managed to foster a sense of community and identity among many of the Japanese people through sheer emotionalism.

3.2.3 Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863) and the Mito School

The later Mito school in the nineteenth century was traditionally a school in the Mito-domain, located in Eastern Central Japan (close to Tokyo), that was focused on uniting religious, political and intellectual elements of Edo Japan against external threats. With the increased presence of Western

48 Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan*, 71.

49 Ibidem, 77.

50 *Kodo Taii* in *Hirata Atsutane zenshu*, I, 22-23. Quoted in: W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, Vol. II, 39. In this work, titled the “True Meaning of the Ancient Way”, Atsutane promulgates Japan as the land where the Gods were born. Through his devotion to Norinaga's work and his persona, it seems likely that he wanted to continue where Norinaga had left. Throughout the work, however, it is clear that his focus lies more on the gods and the divinity of Japan rather than the Emperor, seemingly attempting to instill a sense of national pride among all of the Japanese.

51 W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, Vol. II, 37.

naval ships in the early nineteenth century they took it upon themselves to deal with the growing external presence. The central question was: how do we deal with the foreigners? They saw the task of rebelling barbarians as one of the shogunate. When the Tokugawa shogunate failed to do so, the Mito-men took the lead in repelling the barbarians with vigour. Moreover, they saw the Emperor, as a descendant of the Sun Goddess, as the ordained ruler of Japan. These two considerations combined resulted in the *sonno-joi* movement (Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians) in the 1830's, which would eventually spread throughout the land and would be taken up by rebellious forces in the 1850's. Later they combined with the Neo-Shintoists (adherents to Norinaga and Atsutane, among others), forming the heart of the Japanese nationalist ideology.⁵²

The one considered to have given form to this ideology was Aizawa Seishisai. Born as the son of a samurai, later in life he became the warden of Mito thought. He propagated the theory of *kokutai*, which viewed the Japanese people as “one great family of a particular and distinctive nature, whose Emperor was father as well as lord.”⁵³ Additionally, he was preoccupied with the dangers of foreign aggression. Through the *sonno-joi* thought, the Mito school believed that the moral fibre of the Japanese people was weakening, and foreign relations needed to be held off while the national strength of Japan was built up. Aizawa brought this thought to the public through his work *Shinron*, completed in 1825, in which the idea of *kokutai* was explained and his patriotic ideas promulgated. It quickly gained popularity and soon the work became a favourite in the Han-schools throughout the country.⁵⁴ Where Motoori Norinaga had stressed the superiority of the Japanese heritage and Hirata Atsutane popularized it, arousing a national consciousness, the writings of Aizawa Seishisai had effectively aroused patriotist sentiments under the banner of imperial authority,⁵⁵ strengthening devotion to the nation. Additionally, where the former two scholars mainly stressed difference and enforced identity, the works of Seishisai placed an emphasis on unity, indivisibility and the demonization of the foreign threat:

“Today, the alien barbarians of the West, the lowly organs of the legs and feet of the world, are dashing about across the seas, trampling other countries underfoot, and daring, with their squinting eyes and limping feet, to override the noble nations. What manner of arrogance is this!”⁵⁶

“The means by which a sovereign protects his empire (...) is not the holding of the world in a

52 W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, Vol. II, 84-88.

53 Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan*, 89.

54 Ibidem, 91.

55 Aizawa's ideas revolved mainly around reverence for the Emperor, stressing his exemplary function to the people. He also invoked a particular “public spirit” in his writings, expressed through the reverence of the Emperor and his administration. He made no distinction between classes here, and given his popularity, it is likely that the idea of this public spirit took root. Through this spirit, the Japanese had been given a sense of security during times of crisis. See: H.D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Japan* (University of California Press 1970), 116-117.

56 Takasu, *Shinron kowa*, pp. 1-10. Quoted in: W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, Vol. II, 89.

tight grip or the keeping of people in fearful subjection. His only sure reliance is that the people should be of one mind, that they should cherish their sovereign and that they should be unable to bear being separated from him.”⁵⁷

3.3 Political origins: The Han-domains as Polities

Aside from the intellectual level, some form of proto-nationalist sentiments had their origins in the domainal structure of Japan, at least in the more powerful *han*. This was for several reasons, but notably due to the inherent character of the feudal structure of Edo Japan and the central importance of loyalty in Edo society. In his book *Choshu in the Meiji Restoration*, Albert M. Craig posits the concept of han nationalism⁵⁸, based on the following considerations.

First, due to the feudal structure of Edo Japan that had come into effect in the seventeenth century, there was an increasing sense of loyalty to the status of being a samurai rather than loyalty towards the *daimyo*. With the custom of *sankin-kotai*, a daimyo was required to travel periodically between the *han* and the capital of Edo (now Tokyo), typically spending alternate years in each location. This policy was effectively a measure to keep the daimyo close to the shogun and to make it easier to control them. However, as a result the samurai of the *han* had even less contact with their lord than before, especially in the later years of the Edo-period.⁵⁹ Many of the daimyo could not rule effectively even if they wanted to, as they had little to no idea what was going on in their *han*. Second, through guarantees against outside threat and inside subversion by the Tokugawa feudal system the *daimyo* were not as dependent on their vassals for protection or survival as in earlier times. As a result the daimyo grew less and less dependent on his vassals, while the vassals remained dependent on him. Because of this samurai loyalty to their lord was not decreased but rather increased, as they could not be disloyal.⁶⁰

Combining these two observations, Craig sees a form of *han*-nationalism in which a personal identification with the Han did exist, as well as a growing interest in its daily affairs. This han-nationalism, together with the shift of loyalty from person to status, provided a sense of social cohesion within and among the *han*.⁶¹ This particular position seems more plausible if one considers the aforementioned importance of history and the internal structure of the Han-domains in Edo-Japan. To begin with, before the Edo-period started, there was the Age of Warring States, where the domains all competed for the rule of Japan. Due to the lack of central leadership at this particular time, it is not unreasonable to think that the main source of personal identification lay with the domain itself. If, in this light, we also consider the importance of history for the Japanese, it would seem that this era

57 Takasu, *Shinron kowa*, pp. 13-20. Quoted in: W.T de Bary, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, Vol. II, 91.

58 A.M. Craig, *Choshu in the Meiji restoration* (Lexington Books 2000) 143-149.

59 Craig, *Choshu in the Meiji restoration*, 147-148.

60 Craig, *Choshu in the Meiji restoration*. 146.

61 Ibidem, 359.

would still lay fresh in the minds of the people and even more so in that of the government (hence the *sankin-kotai* policy). As a result, it is highly probable that some form of identification with one's own domain remained.

In addition to this, if we consider the manner in which the Han-domains in the Edo-period were actually structured, there is reason to believe in this position even more. As briefly mentioned earlier, the strength of a domain was measured according to *kokudaka*, a system for determining land value for taxation purposes and expressing this value in *koku* of rice. The more rice a domain could produce, the more powerful it was. Each domain had its own castle, villages, farmers and samurai that worked for the Tokugawa-government. Geographical borders did exist between domains, but all worked in the service of the *bakufu*. In a sense, each Han-domain could be considered a polity as it had a localized government, production economy and its own vassals. In a sense, the *han* could be considered as "proto states".⁶²

Though I have pinpointed several origins of proto-nationalist sentiments in this era of Japan's history, it stands to reason that I now elaborate further on the subject in terms of theories on nationalism and the construction of the "Other" versus the "Self". The former will serve to explain the emergence and development of national consciousness, whereas the latter provides a better understanding of why this national consciousness was able to take root. This will be done in the next chapter.

4. Explaining Nationalism in Japan: Theory and Practice

Having discussed several different subjects with regard to the main research question, it will be useful to take both a more in-depth as well as broader look at these developments; this will offer a more complete understanding of the process of nationalisation in Edo Japan and how this was able to have such a success as a long-term development. First, an attempt will be made to explain the nationalisation process at the hands of the theories of B. Anderson and A.D. Smith, which both hold merit: this position will become clear through the discussion on the theories themselves. Second, the theory behind the concepts of the "Other" and the "Self" will be briefly discussed, as well as their role in the process of nationalisation. These discussions will be summarized and in turn be followed by the final conclusion.

4.1 Applicable modernization theories: A.D. Smith and B. Anderson

The debate on whether the nation or nationalism was first, still rages on. The concept of nationalism is rather chameleonic, due to the fact that it can adhere easily to very different ideologies (such as liberalism and socialism) and many different theories have emerged on the subject. Generally speaking, theorists are divided between the modernist and primordialist camp. The primordialists

⁶² McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity*, 43.

view the nation as ancient and natural phenomenon, which people create through a natural tendency to group together based on kinship. In other words: in their view nationalism was what created the nation. The modernists hold the opposite view and see the nation as a construct, a logical product of modernization. To them modernity created the nation, facilitating the rise of nationalism. In other words, nationalism came after the nation, not before.

Keeping in mind the knowledge of the complex case of Edo Japan that has been gathered so far, some theories seem apt in explaining the emergence of a national consciousness, despite the problems of strong social barriers and an oppressive central government. Both the theories of Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson can be applied to Edo Japan, starting with Smith. Smith places an emphasis on nationalist myths, and blends ethnic and civic components of nationalism by stating that modern nations have an ethnic basis. According to Smith, the emergence of nationalism can be considered a modern phenomenon but it has its basis in long-term historical processes.⁶³ In other words, civic and ethnic conception of the nation overlap.⁶⁴ He proposes his concept of the *ethnie*, which states that the nation: “may (...) be defined as a named human population possessing a myth of common descent, common historical memories, elements of shared culture, an association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity.”⁶⁵ One of the central elements to his theoretical framework is the importance he attributes to the role of symbols and myths; nationalist sentiments [typically] find their expression through common myths and symbols of the shared past of a particular group.⁶⁶ The Emperor, as a common historical symbol through the centuries and having a mythical origin, can be seen as such a unifying mythical symbol. Regarding his definition of the nation, we encounter some difficulties, however. Of the five elements mentioned earlier, it will be difficult to state that the people of Japan had a sense of solidarity. Strong social barriers have been located in Edo society, preventing the rise of a national consciousness and spirit. This is where the theory of Anderson comes in.

Anderson can be regarded as someone holding the modernist position. In his theory, explained in his work *Imagined Communities* (1983), he states that nationality and nationalism are “cultural artefacts”.⁶⁷ Anderson, too, looks at the historical developments behind these cultural artefacts and describes the nation as an imagined community that is both inherently limited and sovereign.⁶⁸ It is imagined because members of society will never know most of their fellow members, limited because the nation has boundaries, sovereign because the nation wishes to be free and a community because the nation is experienced as a deep comradeship.⁶⁹ These definitions and factors

63 A.D. Smith, *The antiquity of nations* (Cambridge 2004), 183: “(...) the nation is not a once-for-all, all-or-nothing, concept (...) historical nations are ongoing processes, sometimes slow in their formation, at other times faster (...). If this is accepted, it means in turn that nations can be seen as both constructs or visions of nationalist (or other) elites, but equally as real, historical formations that embody (...) processes over long time-spans.”

64 Smith, *The antiquity of nations*, 41.

65 Smith, *The antiquity of nations*, 42.

66 Smith, *The antiquity of nations*, 184.

67 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London 1983), 4.

68 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

69 Ibidem, 6-7.

notwithstanding, what makes Anderson's thesis applicable to Edo Japan is the emphasis he places on the emergence of a print capitalism and the factor of simultaneity: the experience of the same information and/or emotion at the same time by members of society across long distances.⁷⁰ According to Anderson, print capitalism facilitated new ways of thinking on the self and the relationship to the other within society⁷¹, as an "imagined linkage" was established between different readers of the same novel or newspaper, connecting them on an intellectual, emotional and/or social level.⁷²

Where does this leave Japan? First, the people can largely be described as an ethnies, as the population in Edo Japan possessed a common myth of descent, common historical memories, elements of shared culture and an association with a particular territory. The symbolism and mythical origin of the Emperor, in light of Smith's thesis, can be considered as a strong factor in the development of a national consciousness. Second, the problem of solidarity seems to be solved by the theory of Anderson. As explained earlier, Tokugawa Japan had a rather free intellectual climate during its last decades. In addition, Edo society also had a rich printing culture⁷³ and the government virtually did not censor any works (13).⁷⁴ Through this printing culture, the works of proto-nationalist intellectuals could be fairly easily spread throughout Edo Japan, breaking the social barriers and fostering the rise of a nationalist consciousness.

4.2 The Other and the Self: China and the West

Before we begin, it is important that the concept of Edward Said on the Other and the Self in his work *Orientalism* is briefly explained. His is a theory that states that persistent Eurocentric prejudice against the Eastern cultures arises from the West's long tradition of false images of Asia. Such perceptions would have served as justifications for the facilitation of Western imperialism and colonialism. In it the creation of a Self and the Other can be seen, where the Self is superior to the Other. According to Said, such a creation is often beligerent and situational.

In the case of Japan, however, there was both a superior Other (China) as well as an inferior Other (The Westerners). It is necessary to state here that it is difficult to determine whether China can truly be seen as an Other, due to Japan's long history of its emulation, and to what extent the Japanese had developed a specific awareness of what it meant to be Japanese to counteract Chinese influences before the Tokugawa-era. Nonetheless, even as time in Edo society progressed, China was still seen as an exemplar by many in terms of Confucianist thought. This would still warrant the mentioning of a superior Other rather than an inferior one, although it is clear that others in Edo society (most notably those following Kokugaku thought) saw Chinese thinking as inferior or nonsensical.

Throughout this paper it is clear that this construction of the Self versus the Other had been of

70 Ibidem, 24-25, 33-35.

71 Ibidem, 36.

72 Ibidem, 33.

73 P.F. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden 1998), 26.

74 Kornicki, *The Book in Japan*, 13

tremendous value in the rise of a specific national consciousness and the propagation thereof. It can be considered necessary for those following the Kokugaku-teachings to have demarcated themselves from China if they were ever to develop a sense of national identity; after all, such sentiments cannot emerge through the sheer absorption of culture and emulation of another. This would make the Self simply a part of the Other. This notion reinforces the idea that nationalism, as a concept, has its main focus in the development and strengthening of a separate identity.

Aside from China and the West, it is also clear that in Late Edo Japan an Other could also be found internally: with the Tokugawa shogunate declining in power, the rise of economic instability and the shogunate's inability to deal with the Westerners as expected by adherents of the Mito-school, there was increasing resistance to the shogun's authority. A portion of the Japanese increasingly identified themselves with the Emperor and denounced the shogunate, making it plausible that the shogun was increasingly seen as an Other whose influence had to be resisted. This was especially the case in the more powerful domains in Western-Japan, such as the Choshu, who would adopt a disobedience policy in Late Tokugawa Japan and actively worked against the shogunate through several rebellions.

National consciousness in pre-modern Japan

Having reached the end of this paper, I will first summarize the most important findings briefly so as to provide not only an overview but also a framework through which a satisfying answer to the main research question can be given. Second, based on this summary, I will attempt to give a satisfying answer to the main question.

First, what it meant to be Japanese did not lie within society or culture. It lay with adherence to tradition, a respect for history and the view of the Emperor. This was exactly which was emphasized by nationalist intellectuals and scholars. Second, although it does not fit the conventional model of the nation-state, Edo-Japan fits to a large degree into this concept. The things that Edo Japan lacks, according to this model, is solidarity and legitimacy. However, by stretching these concepts a little, the problem of solidarity seems to be solved by a rich printing culture and free intellectual climate, breaking the social barriers between the members of Edo society, and legitimacy can be found in the accepted authority of the Emperor. Third, due to a free and vibrant intellectual climate, nationalist ideas could be readily propagated and spread. Furthermore, due to increased literacy rates during the Edo-period of Japan, these ideas could be understood and were adhered to by various classes in Edo-society. Fourth, proto-nationalism could mainly be found on the intellectual level, where the divergence from Chinese philosophy and the increased contact with Westerners led to the propagation of Japan as superior to all other countries. Through the intellectuals a national consciousness developed among the various strata of society. Additionally, shifting loyalties within the *Han*-domains facilitated some degree of *han*-nationalism, a vassal's identification with his own *han* rather than the government and

strengthening social coherence. Fifth, the theories of Anthony D. Smith and B. Anderson aptly explain and reinforce the possible emergence of a national consciousness in pre-modern Japan. The importance they both attribute to culture and their view of nationalisation as a result of historical processes fit strongly with regards to my previous findings. Sixth and last, the visualization of the Japanese as the “Self” and the rest of the world (the “Other”) has been proven highly central to the development of a national Japanese consciousness. In addition, the Japanese respect for tradition, history and the usage of myths have been the focal point through which proto-nationalist ideas had been propagated and accepted.

Considering these findings, my answer to the question regarding to what extent a national consciousness was present in pre-modern Japan is as follows. Despite the presence of serious social and political barriers in Edo Japan, it was highly homogenous in terms of culture, ethnicity and the respect for tradition: this was the specific Japanese identity that existed before pre-modernity. This particular identity facilitated not only the development of Edo Japan towards a nation-state (albeit in a somewhat different conception) but also the acceptance of proto-nationalist ideas and sentiments as propagated by intellectuals such as Norinaga, Atsutane and Seishisai. Due to the fact that this proto-nationalism, which fostered the emergence of national consciousness, was found mainly on an intellectual level means that the ruling classes could understand and spread these ideas effectively amongst the other members of their class and later society. The conception of the “Self” versus the “Other” also played a key role in the acceptance of nationalist ideas and sentiments on all strata of society, as it could be used to differentiate both between Japanese and barbarian as well as subject and government. Starting from the end of the eighteenth century, as internal problems began to rise, a national consciousness started to develop and eventually emerged over the course of the nineteenth century. This national consciousness could initially only be found among intellectuals and like-minded with the ruling class, but would later spread to the lower strata of Edo society. By the end of the 1860's a national consciousness had pervaded much of Edo Japan and provided the basis for the revolutionary road towards the Meiji-Restoration of 1868, where Japan officially entered the age of default modernity.

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