



Stefan Tanaka

## Unification of Time and the Fragmentation of Pasts in Meiji Japan

An enquiry into 'time', as one may have noticed, is a useful point of departure for the great spring-cleaning that is long overdue. There is always a need for it when an intellectual tradition providing the basic means of orientation within its societies has run its course for several centuries, as ours has from the (so-called) Renaissance to the present time.

*Norbert Elias*<sup>1</sup>

In a nutshell, [the logic of] inversion turns the pathways along which life is lived into boundaries within which it is enclosed. Life, according to this logic, is reduced to an internal property of things that *occupy* the world but do not, strictly speaking, *inhabit* it. A world that is occupied but not inhabited, that is filled with existing things rather than woven from the strands of their coming-into-being, is a world of space.

*Tim Ingold*<sup>2</sup>

The archipelago in the Western Pacific that we now call Japan was one of the first non-Western places to write its history following modern European conceptions. For non-Western places this was (and is) an especially difficult process. These societies not only had to deal with new time-reckoning systems – the solar (Gregorian) calendar and the twenty-four hour clock – they also needed to adapt to new temporalities: mechanical time and the notion of progress. Many years ago Edward Said demonstrated one implication of developmental time for our understanding of the world; namely, the way that a particular discursive construction of the Orient is part of a temporal structure that locates it as being at an early stage or as backward.<sup>3</sup> The power of this knowledge system, the difficulty it presented to many Japanese intellectuals as they tried to adapt to this new liberal-internationalist world and its connection to history is evident in a pithy statement by a Japanese re-

1 Norbert Elias, *Time: A Brief Essay* (Oxford, 1992), 93–94.

2 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London, 2011), 145.

3 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).





counted by Erwin Baelz in 1876: 'We have no history. Our history begins today.'<sup>4</sup> This statement suggests that in this encounter history is playing a performative role.

The possibility that a place with over a millennium of recorded heritage has no history is a fascinating admission. In his *Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875) Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the most famous of enlightenment proponents, echoed Hegel when he stated that Japan's government has repeated the same thing for twenty-five centuries.<sup>5</sup> We can find similar statements from other cultures, such as India and China.<sup>6</sup> At the most basic level, this absence of history suggests that the mode of representing the past differed in these societies. But more important, the idea that history begins after more than a millennium of recorded past demonstrates the specificity of history in a society adapting to the modern world. Because of these different understandings of what came before, history has powerful implications in political relations and is more than a descriptor of events and relations. For the first time, Japan needed to discover its past to locate its horizon into some future.

Since Said's classic work, we have interrogated, extended and criticised the idea of Orientalism; we have traversed much ground, from the early critiques of deconstruction and post-everything, beginning with post-structuralism. Yet it strikes me that we always seem to reiterate what has been stated earlier. We, that is Japanese studies (and area studies more broadly), still operate within the discursive structure described by Said. To a rather remarkable extent, forgetting is a part of our knowledge industry. The persistence of this idea, despite empirical work to the contrary, renders meaningful Alfred North Whitehead's notion of a 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness'. In his 1925 Lowell lectures, Whitehead delves into the mechanistic nature of thought, an epistemology that has existed since the seventeenth century and, in his words, we can 'neither live with nor live without'.<sup>7</sup> The misplaced concreteness is the confusion of the material and the abstract, a simplification of a high degree of abstraction. This interplay between material and abstract can occur on several levels. At the root of this confusion, here, is the conflation between the content of pasts and time. In other words, to slip outside

4 Quoted in George Macklin Wilson, *Time and History in Japan*, *American Historical Review* LXXXV, 1980, 3, 570.

5 Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, David A. Dilworth/G. Cameron Hurst (trans.) (Sophia, 1973).

6 See for example Romila Thapar, *Historical Traditions in Early India: c. 1000 BC to c. AD 600*, in: Andrew Feldherr/Grant Hardy (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Beginnings to AD 600*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2011), 533–576.

7 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1967[1925]), 51–55.





of this circularity of critique that ultimately falls back into the structure of Orientalism, we need to be mindful of Elias' call for a spring cleaning, an enquiry into time and history.

In this paper, I would like to explore the extent to which history itself has been a technology that facilitates this fallacy of misplaced concreteness. I follow recent work that has pointed out that beginning in the early nineteenth century, history changed, adapting a unilinear temporal framework rooted in a notion of time as 'empty' or 'homogeneous'.<sup>8</sup> Numerous studies point to the rise of a specific form of historical thinking around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Scholars began to write about the past using a linear, that is, chronological, structure, part of the mechanical nature that Whitehead analyses. The nature of the subject matter also changed, moving from a focus on exemplary deeds and figures to concentrate on the nation and its institutions. Tim Ingold's notion of a logic of inversion cited in the epigraph offers a way to further unpack the implications of this historicity of history. He defines this inversion in the following way, 'Through this logic, the field of involvement in the world, of a thing or person, is converted into an interior schema of which its manifest appearance and behaviour are but outward expressions.'<sup>9</sup> In the transformation of Meiji Japan, linear time becomes the interior schema; history gives it outward form. That history was both the world or universalistic history that Western nations brought to Asia, a concept that located Japan as some backward place and the technique that intellectuals used to formulate a narrative of Japan's national becoming.

Within the field of Japanese history, a major problem has been that efforts to unravel this structure often occur within the same historical framework. When we have described the history of history writing in Japan, we have described the transformation from early modes of history writing to more advanced forms, that is, the jettisoning of inherited practises and knowledge and the adaption of 'modern' ideas and techniques. In evaluations, 'traditional' becomes 'conservative' and 'modern' becomes 'progressive', even 'liberal', largely because of the locus in what is backward or what is new.<sup>10</sup> But because the past is necessary to the modern, and because Japan was the past

8 See for example Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York, 1983); John Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*, Keith Tribe (trans.) (Cambridge/MA, 1985); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley (trans.) (New York, 1988); and Zachary Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore/MD, 2011).

9 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 68.

10 Two very different scholars have pointed to the power and misuse of the 'new' in social discourse: Michel Serres, *The Birth of Time*, in: idem, *Genesis*, Genevieve James/James Nielson (trans.) (Ann Arbor/MI, 1995), and David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old* (Oxford, 2007).





but needed a past to extract itself from that locus, we must formulate a different way of understanding this process. By reorienting the subject of my analysis to history apart from linear time, we can see how history has been a tool that is employed in different and in often contradictory ways. Most important, it becomes possible to recognise that the difficulty of writing history in Japan (and other non-Western places) is often located within history itself, that is within this logic of inversion, rather than in a failure of the Japanese to fully understand. That dilemma within history, which Japanese intellectuals confronted, was that as part of Asia, their inherited knowledge and practises locate them as Oriental, that is without history. To extract themselves from this static category, they needed to separate themselves from their inherited knowledge and practises; but to become a nation, they needed their own past in order to write that history and gain a horizon of expectations. The transformation of history in Meiji Japan was not a movement from one form of writing to another, but rather an inversion, a reformulation of meaning, where words, ideas and data could continue as if they had not changed because of their resemblances to what they had been, though in fact they had been placed within a different conceptual structure so as to alter, considerably, their significance, purpose and meaning.



### 1. Synchronisation: The Unification of Universal Time



In the mid-nineteenth century people in the region we now call Asia did not identify themselves as Asian. They were of a particular community, region or empire; today they are from particular nations. On the continent the word Asia (*yaxiya*) was introduced by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that it gained the meaning of an autonomous geographical place.<sup>11</sup> In Tokugawa society, appellations such as *shinkoku* (the characters for Qing and country) and *tōjin* (the characters for Tang and person) were commonly used for what we today call China or Chinese. Some scholars used *chūka* (middle kingdom) as a condition opposite to *iteki* (barbarian). Each of these terms suggests the relationality of place. In Meiji Japan, Fukuzawa was one of the first to refer to Asia as an area in decline.<sup>12</sup> This is an example of how the logic of inversion has guided our understanding of the change that occurred. 'Asia' is a word for some geographical area that began in the imagination of Europe. For Herodotus (we trace the word back to ancient Greece) Asia was the land to the east (today

11 Rebecca Karl, *Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, *American Historical Review*, CIII, 1998, 4, 1100–1101.

12 Hashikawa Bunsō, *Jungyaku no shisō* (Keisō shobō, 1973), 15–16.





we would call this region Anatolia or the Middle East), but Asians did not inhabit that land, Scythians, Persians, etc. did. In contrast, Donald Lach locates Asia as the lands east of the Indus River, but he writes about China, India, Japan, and the countries of Southeast Asia as metonyms of Asia.<sup>13</sup>

Around the eighteenth century this 'other' gained a temporality. Montesquieu discusses Asia as the static antithesis to a dynamic Europe, Voltaire recognises it as the beginning of civilisation, but one that had never advanced, and Hegel locates Asia in the first stage in the development of history. The very meaning of 'Asia' is thus intertwined with the synchronisation of the places of the Western Pacific into the international world. We call this progress, development, imperialism and colonialism; it is the population of Newtonian time with a linear notion of change; it is the rise of a historical thinking in these regions; it is the division of various territories into nation-states and it is the emergence of the historical discipline that naturalises the progress and development of the world. Asia has become the starting point of a world of progress. But for the places of Asia, it is also the arresting of that process. Although they have experienced much upheaval and change, they have become concrete manifestations of an abstract idea – the static origin.

One problem with this linear temporality can be illustrated through a metaphor borrowed from Michel Serres, a fascinating philosopher of science. He reacts to the linear, progressive time of modern society: 'That's not time, only a simple line. It's not even a line, but a trajectory of the race for first place – in school, in the Olympic Games, for the Nobel Prize. This isn't time, but a simple competition – once again, war. ... The first to arrive, the winner of the battle obtains as his prize the right to reinvent history to his own advantage.'<sup>14</sup> This metaphor of a race strikes me as particularly apposite for the temporality of the modern, especially as it has imbricated our understanding of the non-West. It is competition, the hallmark of capitalism, that places all on treadmills. The acceleration of change in our lives and in our societies aim at that elusive goal of progress, development and modernity. This race to be modern, this conceptual mapping of the world, gives order. Various places are synchronised according to the same system, a temporal metric that assigns position within the absolute space of the globe. Others then are not alter, but other – 'foreign' – participants in a race who can never be first.

Even though this is a hegemonic system, it is often willfully accepted. The seduction of the race is the possibility of participation in a system that seems to offer all the same conditions, absolute time. In Meiji Japan this notion of time was accepted as a basic requirement for attaining the goal of *fukoku kyō-*

13 Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago, 1965).

14 Michel Serres/Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, Roxanne Lapidus (trans.) (Ann Arbor/MI, 1995), 49.





*hei* (rich country, strong military), the horizon of wealth and power. It was the desire of nineteenth-century intellectuals to write their own history of Japan that fit this structure and served their ambitions. This is part of the genius of Hegel's history as well as the genius of modernity – to establish a goal that brings units into one universalistic order and then uses difference marked temporally to explain why others do not measure up. My invocation of Hegel is because of his centrality in the making of history or, more accurately, in the dissemination of this form of developmental or historical thinking. He placed Asia at the beginning of history, a stage characterised by despotism, childishness and a 'repetition of the same majestic ruin'.<sup>15</sup> He is certainly not the leading or only intellectual to render the world according to the absolute time and space of Newton. The brilliance of this formulation is that it takes a relational idea and fixes it along a mechanical continuum. Through history, Asia became the outward form – the past that is still living – that naturalised that inner schema. Hegel exhibits this naturalisation: 'Time is real and objective not only because it constitutes the framework within which the subject organises possible experience; it is real because it is the process which exhibits the reality of the subject itself.'<sup>16</sup> The noun 'time' can be replaced by 'Asia'. Asia is the concrete manifestation of an abstract idea. In this early moment when the Japanese began to discover a past, they found that they were the past, the living past of the West lumped together with India and China.



## 2. Discovery of Pasts

This synchronisation of the places of this archipelago provides the potential for reconceiving society and also illustrates the power of history to restrict. Within Japan, what had hitherto been the present, which included over a millennia of accumulated experience, was no longer apposite to this world. In other words, the unity of time and society had been broken. Time was uneven, but its variability was synchronised with social life and the specificity of place, so that its unity was 'natural'. The lunisolar calendar was more closely tied to the agrarian, non-capitalist economy. It marked auspicious and inauspicious days, days of rest were connected to the movement of the moon, 'holidays' were tied to especially powerful days. The day was broken up into six equal units of daylight and six equal units of dark; and obviously

<sup>15</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956[1837]), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago, 1987), 36.





these twelve units were neither equal nor constant. In 1872 the Meiji state changed time, it adopted the Gregorian calendar and the twenty-four hour clock. The change sparked the following lament for the lunisolar system of time keeping:

Why did the government suddenly decide to abolish it? The whole thing is disagreeable. The old system fitted in with the seasons, the weather and the movement of the tides. One could plan one's work or one's clothing or virtually anything else by it. Since the revision ... Nothing is the way it should be.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of Japan, it is a mistake to connect the discovery of the past with the coming of the West and the Meiji *ishin*.<sup>18</sup> The separation of the past from the present was not a result of Western encroachment. It began earlier amidst the intellectual world of the Tokugawa era and accelerated after the *ishin*. In the eighteenth century a group of intellectuals known as the *kokugaku* (nativist studies) school argued that the ancient ideal is not that of the sages and texts of ancient China but can be found in the extant writings from ancient Japan. Motoori Norinaga turned to the *Kojiki*, a chronicle completed in 712, eight years before the *Nihon shoki*, the hitherto authoritative account of Japan's ancient past. Although only separated by eight years, the *Kojiki* was written in ancient Japanese using Chinese characters. The *Nihon shoki* was written in Chinese, in Chinese characters and using the Chinese style of dynastic chronologies. This elevation of the *Kojiki* begins a separation of the archipelago from the intellectual order centred around ancient (and contemporary) China and facilitates an 'idea' of Japan. Moreover, the followers of this school would become important figures in an early attempt to formulate a history of Japan in the mid-Meiji period.<sup>19</sup>

The idea that a past needs to be discovered is difficult to grasp in our modern age.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in Meiji Japan that idea took hold, and it did so in sporadic and varied ways.<sup>20</sup> An early indication that present practises might no longer be apposite for the contemporary world appeared in 1868 when the new government issued the Charter Oath, a broad statement of principles. The fourth item stated, 'Evil customs of the past shall be abandoned, and actions shall be based on international usage.'<sup>21</sup> Verification that evil

17 Quoted in Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton/NJ, 2004), 8.

18 *Ishin* is commonly translated as restoration. I use *ishin* to emphasise the revolutionary, not restorative nature of this event. See Tetsuo Najita, *Japan's Industrial Revolution in Historical Perspective*, in: Masao Miyoshi/H. D. Harootunian (eds.), *Japan in the World* (Durham/NC, 1993), 13–20.

19 For a provocative, new study that demonstrates the historicity of the past, see Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past*.

20 I have described the gradual discovery of pasts in Tanaka, *New Times*, esp. 27–53.

21 Robert M. Spaulding, *The Intent of the Charter Oath*, in: Richard K. Beardsley (ed.), *Studies in Japanese History and Politics* (Ann Arbor/MI, 1967), 11.





customs were indeed past came in April 1868 when the government issued the first of several laws separating gods and spirits (*kami*) from boddhi-sattva. Shrines (Shinto) and temples (Buddhist) had been administered by the Buddhist priests, and temples in addition to their religious function often performed administrative duties for the local lord. The destruction of many temples, and of their many books, statues and buildings that this law provoked indicates that these objects were not viewed as relics, artifacts or antiques, but as material of the [hated] present. Shortly thereafter their meaning began to change as statues and other discarded objects appeared in treaty port shops that catered to Westerners who view them as antiques. In 1872 the government conducted the *jinshin* survey to catalogue the objects in temples and shrines, primarily in the Kansai area, and in 1884 a law was passed regulating 'antique' stores. Another event that indicates the severing of a part of the present into a past occurred in 1877, when Edward Morse found evidence of cannibalism in shell middens exposed during the laying of railroad track between Tokyo and Yokohama. The ensuing debate could lead to only two conclusions: these ancient people were not Japanese, which would break the unity between place (the archipelago) and people, or the Japanese had been/are cannibals. By the end of the 1870s, as time was being unified, the archipelago increasingly possessed myriad pasts. Turning these myriad pasts into a history, though, was not an easy process.



### 3. An Attempt to Write History

Linkage to an antecedent can be a powerful tool in legitimating a new government. From the very beginning of the new regime, its leaders recognised the need for a written account that would connect the new government with the distant past and give the impression that they were 'restoring' an earlier form of government. As early as 1869 an imperial edict was issued that begins, 'Historiography is a for ever immortal state ritual and a wonderful act of our ancestors'.<sup>22</sup> More important, the government established an Office of Historiography, charged with compiling a history along the lines of the Six Histories which were written during the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1183) periods. This new chronicle would, it was hoped, establish a connection between the new government and an ancient aristocracy. Since its founding, the Office underwent numerous reorganisations as well as leadership changes. In part, its instability can be attributed to the impossibility of its task: to continue a twelfth- or fourteenth-century chronology written in

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Margaret Mehl, *History and the State in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (New York, 1998), 1.







Chinese so as to legitimate a new (modern) government that sought now to distance itself from China, and to do so while using or at least acknowledging a temporal structure borrowed from the West.<sup>23</sup> Underlying this complicated problem was a more fundamental issue: the uncertainty of history given the instability of the past. A connection to an earlier moment is not the same as a narrative of national becoming. Moreover, the popular movements and protests of the first half of the 1880s, which culminated in the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement, spurred many in government to view history as a tool to foster the unity of the nation and loyalty to the state.

The scholars who filled the positions at the Office of Historiography generally belonged to one of two intellectual traditions. Many had trained in the knowledge system that drew heavily on neo-Confucian forms of learning. The histories they had learned were based on the dynastic compilations of the different Chinese empires. These historians, called *kangaku* scholars, were skilled in careful exegetical readings of texts. Shigeno Yasutsugu and Kume Kunitake are two of the most active and best known of these scholars. The other principal group was trained in nativist studies. This group traces its lineage back to great philologists like Motoori and his influential reinterpretation of the *Kojiki*. The followers of this group saw the possibility of 'restoring' ancient texts, which they hoped to unearth the 'pure' Japanese sensibility that had obtained before the assimilation of Chinese ideas and culture.

My purpose in this essay is not to recount the unfolding of history writing,<sup>24</sup> but rather to explore how the past changed making it possible for a history to be written. These scholars brought different intellectual traditions to the task, had different notions of what a suitable past is, and, while sharing an interest in the nation, they defined it differently. An important group I will not cover are those who have been called 'enlightenment proponents', Fukuzawa and Taguchi Ukichi among them. These intellectuals argued for a linear, progressive history, invoking Western historians such as Henry Tho-

23 This office eventually became the Historiographical Institute in 1895, still at the Imperial University of Tokyo. The many name and organisational changes reflect the controversies surrounding the past, as well as the difficulty in coming to grips with it. For example, in 1881 the antecedent changed when the Institute was directed to compile a chronology beginning in the fourteenth century. For an account of these different offices, see Mehl, *History and the State*; and Tanaka, *New Times*.

24 There are many other accounts that have covered this ground. Two recent essays are Axel Schneider/Stefan Tanaka, 'The Transformation of History in China and Japan', in: Stuart MacIntyre/Juan Maiguascha/Attila Pok (eds.), *Oxford History of History Writing, 1800–1945*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 2011), 491–519; and Margaret Mehl: 'The mid-meiji 'history boom': The Professionalisation of Historical Scholarship and the Growing Pains of an Emerging Academic Discipline', *Japan Forum* X, 1998, 1, 67–83.





mas Buckle and Francois Guizot. In the end, though they were important advocates, they did not write that history.<sup>25</sup>

The 1880s exhibit a considerable rise, a ‘boom’, of interest in a history of Japan.<sup>26</sup> A number of historians have attributed this interest to a renewed conservatism, an emphasis on the nation in reaction to Westernisation.<sup>27</sup> Yet the controversy that surrounded the writing of history should be seen as a part of the process of becoming a modern nation-state. The scholars were engaged in debate aimed at determining what Ingold calls the ‘internal property of things’. In 1883 the Shigaku kyōkai became the first history association of modern Japan; it began publishing its journal, the *Shigaku kyōkai zasshi* in July of that year. Prior to this moment history had been taught as Western History, while Japan’s past was taught in the Department of Japanese and Chinese Literature (*wakan bungaku*). The founding of this history association was one result of a concerted effort to institutionalise the discipline of history within the main university, Tokyo University. One year earlier, Inoue Yorikuni and Konakamura Kiyonori, professors in the Department of Japanese and Chinese Literature, established the Center for Investigation of Ancient Texts (Kōten kōkyūjo) with the support of Katō Hiroyuki, president of university. The first course on Japanese history, it should be noted, was not taught at Tokyo University but at its preparatory school. Katō also supported the founding of the Shigaku kyōkai, of which Konakamura and Inoue were founding members.

The Shigaku kyōkai has generally been overlooked in standard surveys of historiography. It is indeed easy to miss them if one follows a linear progression of historiographical developments within the adapt/react model of change. But it is at this point that linearity – our practice of retrospectively recounting how things have become what they are – has determined that historiography. The *kangaku* scholars, such as Shigeno and Kume, are usually described as traditional and rather bland, largely because their textual criticism resulted in very detailed and rigorous analysis of texts.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the history and compendiums they were preparing were written

25 Indeed, historians who have tried to celebrate these intellectuals as ‘enlightened’, that is proponents of Western ideas, have had a difficult time sustaining their praise as the more these men learned about the West and its ideas the more they became more nuanced and nationalistic. For a recent attempt to sustain such a positive interpretation by avoiding the last thirty years of Fukuzawa’s career, see Albert M. Craig, *Civilization and Enlightenment: The Early Thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge/MA, 2009).

26 Mehl has described this rise in interest in history in her The mid-meiji ‘history boom’.

27 See for example Okubo Toshiaki, *Nihon kindai shigaku no seiritsu* (Tokyo, 1988), esp. 51–58.

28 Peter Duus, Whig History, Japanese Style: The Min’yūsha Historians and the Meiji Restoration, *Journal of Asian Studies* XXXIII, 1974, 3, 415–436.





in Chinese (by practice and decree), a fact that, certainly supports a charge of traditionalism. Nativist studies scholars, on the other hand, have been depicted as conservative because of their focus on ancient texts and their emphasis on the imperial system. Though these categorisations oversimplify, they are not without some validity, and they were used in the rhetoric of the vying sides. But for my purpose, to categorise the two schools in these ways for using their learned conceptual systems as they sought to elevate Japan's past into a history is to diminish their contribution and to downplay the often radical nature of their critiques of canonical texts. Indeed, I will suggest later that it is devious; for it glorifies the West, exonerates history, and obscures the inversion that occurs in the formulation of history.

The significance of this concerted effort to give form to the past, in conjunction with the increasing separation of the past from the present, is that it first called into question the standard interpretation that the Japanese had adapted from the West, and then a conservative reaction set in. At the very least, it suggests that a simultaneity existed in which changes toward a greater incorporation of Western ideas and objects existed side by side with an increasing concern for ordering Japan's own past. For example, the iconic event of Westernisation was the November 1883 opening of the Rokumeikan, the hall designed by Josiah Conder in French Renaissance style to host and entertain Western dignitaries. The simultaneity of these two events – the foundation of the Shigaku kyōkai and the opening of the Rokumeikan – suggests that both were constituent parts of the process of joining the 'race' by becoming a modern nation-state. Japanese intellectuals were demonstrating comparability between Japanese and Western forms, while at the same time turning to a particular part of their past, an essential part of nation-making and not some kind of conservative reaction. But even more, such an interpretation ignores the contradictory positions of pasts in the making of a modern nation. It accepts the end point, the academic history of Japan that established the boundaries, the 'internal property of things'.

The lead essay of the inaugural issue of *Shigaku kyōkai zasshi* was written by Maruyama Sakura, a codirector of the association.<sup>29</sup> Maruyama's essay exhibits the transition that many of the members of this school were under-

29 Maruyama Sakura, *Shigaku kyōkai sōritsu no shushi*, *Shigaku kyōkai zasshi*, no. 1 (July 1883), 2–8. Maruyama, a professed disciple of Hirata Atsutane, served the government in various capacities since the *ishin*. In 1882 he helped organise the Rikken Teiseito, the Imperial Constitutional Party, a government party organised to counter the political parties supporting the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement, and in 1886 he became assistant head librarian of the Imperial Household Ministry.





going.<sup>30</sup> It shares ideas with enlightenment scholars, such as Fukuzawa and Miyake Yonekichi, as well as with *kangaku* historians, such as Shigeno and Kume. He, too, laments the poor state of historical writing and understanding about Japan. History, he asserts, is more than events and records, rise and fall, order and decay and customs and habits. It should include abstractions: rights, obligations, and the the idea of the nation and its structure. He complains that most accounts of the past are not about Japan, but are written for or by a particular group and to represent a particular perspective. They therefore lack narrative form – a swipe at the annalistic style taken over from China, as well as at the stories of great deeds. In short, he suggests that many of the hitherto authoritative texts are not history. He does not go so far as to question their overall veracity or their historical utility, as did Shigeno and Kume, but he does specifically criticise two canonical works: the *Dai nihon shi*, which he found to be written simplistically, ‘in childish language’; and the *Kojiki*, which he complained was written with Chinese ideographs.<sup>31</sup> Maruyama and his colleagues played an important role in transforming the subject of history from a compendium of ethical stories fragmented by locale to a geographical abstraction, the space of the nation. Maruyama’s lineage traces back to Motoori and Hirata, but his advocacy for the ancient past is less a championing of the emperor and the imperial lineage, than a use of imperial continuity as a means for describing the nation. He implores attendees to work for a history that restores the ‘great imperial Japan’ (*dai nihon teikoku*), but he ends his essay by acknowledging that it is unclear what will be the shape of a history of Japan. Parallel to this effort to write a history of Japan, emerged a movement by intellectuals to unify the language and nation. Such a unification also affected the historical debates. Records of the past had been written in Chinese, and initial efforts to compile a history of Japan had persisted in using that language. But nativist studies scholars complained that a Japanese history should be written in Japanese; this was, on the one hand, a continuation of the nativist emphasis on the ancient texts that separated Japan from ancient China. In 1889 Konakamura pointed out the difficulty of fostering a history of Japan when much of the existing accounts were written in Chinese. But more germane, during the 1880s an international issue, the problem of Asia, was very much on the minds of Japanese intellectuals. This was most strongly articulated in 1891 when Inoue Tetsujirō, a professor of philosophy at the Imperial University of Tokyo,

30 For an account of nativist studies scholars during the Meiji period, see Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham/NC, 2003).

31 One of the earliest versions of the *Kojiki* available in a vernacular Japanese was Iida Nagao’s 1888 Japanese translation of Basil Hall Chamberlain’s English translation of that text.





wrote an essay arguing for a Japanese Oriental history program.<sup>32</sup> Inoue complained that while studying in Europe, he was often identified as Chinese. A Japanese Oriental history would be a corrective to the ignorance and misunderstandings of Westerners. But the most troubling misunderstanding for Inoue was not about Asia as such, but rather the identification of Japan as belonging within Asia, that is, being like China. Inoue believed that empirical research would correct the identification of the Japanese as Orientals, and therefore backward.

This shift of the unit of analysis to the space of Japan, however, ultimately helped to undermine the goals of the Shigaku kyōkai. The conversion of history into the history of a nation was coterminous with the rise of modern history and nation-states.<sup>33</sup> It was, therefore, a necessary step in Japan's synchronisation with the international system. In the second to last issue of the *Shigaku kyōkai zasshi*, Iida Nagao writes, 'national history (*kokushi*) describes the actual experience of the populous/people (*jinmin*) since the founding of the country. More specifically, national history brings together nationals (*kokumin*), considers them as one person and records the deeds of that [collective] person; it is the biography of that person, the unification of the nationals, their features, nature, work and intercourse as well as their religion, laws and government.'<sup>34</sup> Konakamura, too, argued in the *Shigakkai zasshi*, the inaugural issue of the Japanese Historical Association, that a national history is important first of all to develop a sense of patriotism and national unity, and second because an understanding of the customs and habits of the past facilitates good government.<sup>35</sup> Maruyama's acceptance of principles and rights, Iida's framing of history as the space of the nation that bounds and contains, and Konakamura's pedagogical and utilitarian reasons further the separation of the past from the present.

But even though these scholars increasingly recognised the events prior to their present as a past, that past seemingly included everything; the problem became populating that past in some orderly fashion. In two essays published within two-years time, we can see the limitations of the Shigaku kyōkai's effort to organise the past so as to write history. In its opening editorial,

32 Inoue Tetsujirō, Tōyōshigaku no kachi, *Shigakkai zasshi*, no. 2 (1891), 709–717; no. 2 (1891), 788–798 and no. 3 (1892), 1–14. For a fine account of Inoue that covers his engagement with Western scholarship and his gradual move toward a more Japan-centred idea, see Richard Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu/HI, 2008).

33 For a fine study on the simultaneity of nation formation in Japan, the United States and France, see Christopher Hill, *National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States* (Durham/NC, 2008).

34 Iida Nagao, Shiron, *Shigaku kyōkai zasshi*, no. 26 (1885), 819.

35 Konakamura Kiyonori, Rekishi no hanashi, *Shigakkai zasshi*, no. 1(1889), 5–10.





the board listed twenty-four historical categories: creation (of heaven and earth), the heavenly deities, imperial lineage, the bureaucracy (court), ritual and ceremony, imperial travel regalia, music, literature, military system, weapons, law, food distribution, agriculture, commerce, engineering, art, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, feudalism, geography, customs, foreign relations and Buddhism. Here, the past is flat, a plane of recorded happenings with more or less equal weight. Time, too, is not an important metric or marker. The timeless past is lined up with the distant (dead) past and the living past. In this listing, the imperial genealogy and accounts of its emergence and deeds came first. Maruyama cited Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō shōtōki* (ca. 1339) as a suitable example of a national history.<sup>36</sup> His praise for this text rested on the presence within it of a unifying ideal for the nation, *taigi meibun* (the ethical relations between emperor and subjects). Most categories were closer to a living past, being concerned with those aspects of life that continue, such as customs, geography, mathematics, astronomy, and food distribution. These appear mixed in with items from the now-distant past, such as weapons, feudalism and Buddhism.<sup>37</sup>

Two years later Iida offered a shorter list of ten categories in his essay on history: geography, government and law, customs, literature, art, religion, farming, crafts, merchants and foreign relations.<sup>38</sup> The creation, heavenly deities, the imperial lineage, ceremony and the court either disappeared or were folded into categories such as politics and religion. Iida's proposal for ordering the past amounted to an act of categorisation that increased the remove and compartmentalisation of the past. It is hard to imagine where Chikafusa's glorification of the imperial line, which begins with the creation of the islands (Ōyashima), would fit in Iida's structure. Perhaps in government and law, geography, customs or religion? But to do so would break up the unity of the narrative, which consists in a continuous succession of emperors and empresses reaching back to creation, and it would substitute for that unified story a collection of parts, of data that fit the different categories. The timeless elements that were of concern to nativist-school historians would of necessity be severed in the making of a modern history of Japan.

The impossibility of any endeavour to maintain the unity of the hitherto authoritative texts while conforming them to abstract historical categories

36 According to H. Paul Varley, the first draft was completed in 1339, but the extant version was revised in 1343. *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns: Jinnō Shōtōki of Kitabatake Chikafusa*, H. Paul Varley (trans.) (New York, 1980).

37 It would be several years before the temple complexes and various sects that had lost their influence would reconfigure themselves into a Buddhist religion. See James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton/NJ, 1990).

38 Iida, Shiron, 819.





led toward a fissure that further divided the past into what we now know as the disciplines of history and national literature. Nativist scholars relinquished history, while history relinquished the people and their sensibilities. The Shigaku kyōkai disbanded in 1885 and was replaced by the Ōyashima gakkai (Association of the Great Myriad Islands [Japan]) in 1886. The change is telling. The name ‘Ōyashima’ is an ancient appellation for what we now call ‘Japan’. Literally, it means ‘the eight great islands’ the islands that were created by the gods Izanami and Izanagi. The Ōyashima gakkai focused on the ancient texts and earlier histories, what we now call the classics, which include the *Kojiki* and *Dai nihon shi*. In other words, the disbanding of the Shigaku kyōkai was a recognition of the limitations of that vision of history, while the founding of the Ōyashima gakkai shifted emphasis to the centrality of the ethical ideals embedded in the now old accounts (that is, to Japanese literature) as the foundational knowledge of the nation.

#### 4. History or Mythistory

The transformation of the Shigaku kyōkai parallels an institutional reform at the Imperial University of Tokyo that would reign over the distant and increasingly categorised past. In 1885 the Department of Japanese and Chinese Literature was split into departments of Japanese Literature (*wabun gakka*) and of Chinese Studies (*kangaku*); in 1889 the former became the Department of National Literature (*kokubungaku*). In 1887 a Department of History was founded and Rudolph Riess, a young German historian with distant ties to Leopold von Ranke, was hired. In 1889 a Department of Japanese History (*kokushi*) followed, and took its place alongside the Department of History and the Department of Japanese Literature. And finally in that year the Japanese Historical Association was established. Shigeno and Kume became professors of Japanese History; Konakamura and Naitō Chisso remained in the Department of National Literature. Moreover, the Center for Investigation of Ancient Texts became an educational institution in its own right (Kokugakuin), specialising in the teaching of Japan’s past through the lens of Shinto. This suggests yet another division of the past: the discipline of national literature would honour the unity of the texts that had been the authoritative accounts of the past in such a way as to extract the general trends, ethics, sensibilities and spirit of the nation; Kokugakuin would play an important role in merging the myriad spirits that existed on the archipelago with the nation; this sacred past became the archive for State Shinto.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> For accounts of the history of national literature, see Haruo Shirane/Tomi Suzuki (eds.), *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stan-





This fragmentation of Japan's past into the living, the sacred and the distant enabled the discipline of history to enter Serres' race at last, synchronising itself with Western histories. The first consequence of this new history was its usefulness to the state. In his inaugural address as the first President of the Japanese Historical Association, Shigeno concluded:

It is my hope that, when we have subjected to the processes of Western historical scholarship the materials which the Office of Historiography and its successors have collected and when we have in that light examined the evidence of our country's past and compiled a history therefrom, the formation of this Historical Association will have proved to have done the state some service.<sup>40</sup>

Second, the new departments of History and Japanese History reigned over the contracted, distant past. Shigeno signals the centrality of data collection for the production of history. The understanding of what constituted "data" now went well beyond the previously accepted authoritative sources. The creation of an archive of material collected throughout the archipelago was, in fact, one of the lasting accomplishments of this office. Two examples are the *Koji ruien* (Encyclopedia of Ancient Matters), a massive compendium of material on life, objects and events in premodern Japan. It was first published between 1896 and 1913 in 350 volumes and is still in print. Konakamura was a principal figure in this undertaking. After the Historiographical Institute was reorganised (for a final time) in 1895, it began publishing the materials collected by Shigeno, Kume and colleagues as the *Dai nihon shiryō* (Chronological Source Books of Japanese History) and *Dai nihon komonjo* (Old Documents of Japan), documents about political figures and institutions from throughout the archipelago. When Shigeno mentions 'processes of Western historical scholarship' he is alluding to the study of the past as a science. The methods of this science were outlined in a memo by the president of the Imperial University advocating for the new Japanese History Department. Watanabe Kōki wrote, 'Today in order to understand social phenomena of a particular time and space, we will collect books, handicrafts and other artifacts of those times; dissect and analyse them; discern their qualities and research these things at a library just as science uses laboratories.'<sup>41</sup>

These compilations, however, were far from neutral or innocent projects; documents that bore meaning in a particular timespace were now shorn of their context and placed into an abstract spatial entity called 'Japan'. The application of time altered the truth of this distant, soon to be historical past.

ford/CA, 2000). For a history of the transformation of the *kami* into State Shinto, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868–1945* (Princeton/NJ, 1989).

40 Quoted in Thomas Keirstead, *Inventing Medieval Japan: The History and Politics of National Identity*, *The Medieval History Journal* I, (1998), 1, 61.

41 *Tokyo teikoku daigaku gojūnenshi*, vol 1 (Tokyo, 1932), 1297.







Dates served as a framework for separating the data from the present and as a 'neutral' unit for comparison and verification (as if time at that era was unified). For example, when Shigeno found that documents disagreed on the dating of Kusunoki Masashige's battle at Tennōji, he suggested that the record of Kusunoki's deeds was unreliable, perhaps even legendary in nature. He also claimed that Kojima Takanori, the reputedly loyal retainer of Emperor Go-Daigo, was fictive.<sup>42</sup> The events surrounding Go-Daigo were politically significant because of the desire to connect the new government, as a restoration, to the Kenmu *ishin* of the fourteenth century. Time also facilitated evaluation. Kume Kunitake, Shigeno's colleague, highlighted the remove in time of these now old texts by declaring that the narrative of the *Heike monogatari* was childlike.<sup>43</sup> Frequent use was made of the metaphor of the child because it conveniently placed texts at an earlier moment of comparative ignorance and simplicity, and sometimes removed them from the purview of history altogether.

This work operationalises Watanabe's memo and speaks to the inversion that turns former reality – stories about exemplary experience – into fiction and establishes a new historical reality based on abstract criteria, the space of Japan and a linear (or universal) time. Neither criteria had existed when the documents were produced. The now finite past – the distant past of verifiable data could then be further fragmented and ordered anew – dissected, analysed and classified. From the standpoint of Konakamura or the nativist sense of the past, this might have looked like an act of vivisection. To paraphrase Ingold, these tools establish that internal property of things that occupy but do not inhabit the past. Such a classificatory system is a part of the logic of inversion, where abstractions and the methodologies that support those abstractions became as important, if not more important than the content. Rather than explaining this development as a turn toward a more conservative (i.e. nationalistic) rhetoric, I prefer to see it as a moment when the category of 'meaning' took precedence over 'content'. Michel de Certeau has this to say about the relationship between the different pasts: „

Our technical practices are often as silent, as circumscribed and as essential as were the initiation rites of the past, but henceforth they are of a scientific nature. It is in relation to these technical practices that historical discourse is elaborated, assuring them as a symbolic legitimacy and at the same time, "respecting" them. – ... historical discourse becomes the one possible myth of a scientific society that rejects myth ...<sup>44</sup>

42 Shigeno Yasutsugu, Shi no hanashi, in: Tanaka Akira/Miyachi Masato (eds.), *Rekishi ninshiki* (Tokyo, 1991), 339–355.

43 Kume Kunitake, *Rekishigaku no susumi*, in: Tanaka Akira/Miyachi Masato (eds.), *Rekishi ninshiki* (Tokyo, 1991), 223.

44 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Brian Massumi (trans) (Minneapolis/MN, 1986), 220.





A key technical practice, in the words of Ingold ‘the interior schema,’ is time, both as a metric that is employed to turn a living past into distant data and as a naturalised developmental structure (chronological time) to map that data. During the 1890s history also gained chronology, and it is in the context of this conflation between linear time and historical chronology that the ‘new’ practises become silent and descend into a ‘respected’ historical discourse. One of the more interesting studies was Naka Michiyō’s recalibration of the chronology in the *Kojiki*; he declared that the first three thousand years of the accounts of Emperors (and Empresses), prior to Ingyō (412–453) are inaccurate and even fictive.<sup>45</sup> Beyond the question of real or not, ancient Japan gained temporality; it was not so much important as source of some essence, as much as it was necessary to determine the beginning of the narrative of the continuous development of the nation-state. The desire to subject the ancient texts to evaluation, to ‘dissect and analyse them, discern their qualities and research these things’, was to determine their place (if at all) on a historical timeline. This is a process of distillation of materials, of removing them from what had been their immediate context and meaning system and placing them into a putatively larger system, the space of Japan.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, even though the meaning has changed, it was still the ancient period. Another key moment occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century as a medieval history was articulated, filling out the historical periodisation.<sup>47</sup> The inversion was accomplished. By the first decade of the twentieth century, a chronological historical structure – ancient, medieval, modern – became standard, and linear time and historical chronology merged. This naturalisation of time and nation enabled history to claim that it narrates the historical reality of the nation, the ‘myth of a scientific society that rejects myth’.

45 Naka Michiyō, Joseinenki kō, *Shigaku zasshi* VIII (1897), 747–778, 884–910, 997–1021, 1206–1231. An early version of this study appeared in 1888.

46 Paul Nadasdy describes this process of distillation in the contact between environmental scientists and the Kluane First Nation. The similarity between the confrontation between the scientists with their abstracted knowledge and the Kluane beliefs and understanding and this process of writing history in Meiji Japan is remarkable. Paul Nadasdy, The Politics of TEK: Power and the ‘Integration’ of Knowledge, *Arctic Anthropology* XXXVI, 1999, 1/2, 1–18. It reminds me of Georg Simmel’s sage comment: ‘The things that determine and surround our lives, such as tools, means of transport, the products of science, technology and art, are extremely refined. Yet individual culture, at least in the higher strata, has not progressed at all to the same extent; indeed, it has even frequently declined.’ Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, David Frisby (ed.), Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (trans.) (London, 1990), 448.

47 See Keirstead, *Inventing Medieval Japan*.





## 5. The Possibility of Histories

To close, I would like to bring out an alternative vision of a national past, one that would neither require fragmenting the past nor function as a documentary archives of data that could be used to construct a chronological narrative. Instead it would be based more on the experience of the collective inhabitants. During the 1890s Miyake Setsurei, a public intellectual who founded the Seikyosha and edited its journal *Nihonjin*, wrote widely on the past and its relation to the present nation. Based on his writings on Japanese characteristics, he has commonly been juxtaposed with Tokutomi Sohō as the more conservative and nationalistic intellectual. Yet, the following statement from his famous text *Shinzenbi nihonjin* (Japanese: ‘truth’, ‘goodness’, ‘beauty’) written in 1890, suggests a quite different notion of the past and how it accumulates into the history of a nation.

How could the natural country of Japan, be a place that organised itself? From the legends of the *Kojiki* – chronicles which are probably not accurate – which depict much turmoil many thousands of years ago, there is procreation, reproduction, cooperation and expansion. In this way, there are as many as 40 million loving descendants, who exist over a long period and have a great variety of stations in life, this is smelted (porcelain), brewed (sake) and gradually forms the nation of Japan. The nation-state is not organised from desire and constructed like a company – planning, leisurely discussion and the distribution of pamphlets (opinion papers). Each person in the nation of Japan with this history is called Japanese.<sup>48</sup>

Miyake’s sense of history is as an accumulation of the activities and experiences of the people, what Ingold calls the many ‘strands of their coming-into-being’. Miyake’s past was not a distant, dead past of documents separated from the evidence of living or sacred pasts. It was not a story that could be neatly ordered (chronologically) into a narrative of political becoming. It is closer to a place that Ingold sees as inhabited.

This idea has the potential to engender a different kind of political system. It can deemphasise the mediating structures (such as the former samurai who steered the government away from the common people) in such a way as to allow for greater participation and a more direct relationship (more democratic) between the ruler and ruled. Antecedents for this ethical past were evident in the writings of some of the nativist historians, like Konakamura, Maruyama and Iida discussed above. This idea was also actively debated during the early twentieth century in the legal interpretation of Minobe Tatsukichi and the political theory of Yoshino Sakuzō. Both scholars

<sup>48</sup> Miyake Setsurei, *Shinzenbi nihonjin*, in: *Miyake Setsurei shū, Gendai nihon bungaku zenshū*, vol 5. (Kaizōsha, 1931), 217. For more detail on this interpretation of Miyake, see Tanaka, *New Times*, esp. 85–110.





sought to interpret the constitution to enable greater participation of the populace and to decrease the power of the bureaucracy and of governmental institutions. To label such historians as 'conservative' because of their fidelity to a particular past of the nation, overlooks an alternative that would certainly have been less statist than the one that emerged.

At last, I turn to Norbert Elias' statement, one of the the epigraphs of this paper. It is essential to historicise the particular ways that time has naturalised categories that bind as much as they enable. This enquiry brings out the fact that 'Japan', like the idea of Asia that envelops it, is myth, in the sense that Joseph Mali gives that word: 'a story that has passed into and become history'.<sup>49</sup> Myths are built upon a logic of inversion between the material and the abstract. History, through a notion of universal time, has dissected, analysed and classified the past into stable, predictable forms that meet the political needs of the liberal-international system or of the state. It is maintained by the historical thinking that has been institutionalised in our global system, as well as by our disciplines of history and area studies as they are today constituted. History is a practice that often restricts understanding to a category that is occupied, not lived; this is certainly true of the idea of Asia and of the national history in Japan.<sup>50</sup> We must further be mindful that to extract ourselves from these categories, we must unpack the conflation of linear time with chronological history and broaden our understanding of pasts.



49 Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003), 6.

50 For a brilliant example of this power, see Masao Miyoshi, Japan is not Interesting, in: idem, *Trespases: Selected Writings* (Durham/NC, 2010), 189–204.

