

The Meiji Restoration

Japan as a Global Nation

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10 Locally Ancient and Globally Modern Restoration Discourse and the Tensions of Modernity

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The language of the Meiji Restoration embodies a profound contradiction. The new government described its actions and policies both as a “revival of ancient kingly rule” (*ōsei fukko*), but also as a revolution (*isshin*). These phrases are in direct opposition: *fukko* refers explicitly to the ancient past, while *isshin* declares, on the contrary, that all is being made new. In some ways, such revolutionary invocations of the ancient past suggest Marx’s famous Eighteenth Brumaire: “[P]recisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis, [men] anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.” For Marx, of course, this was the ultimate betrayal of revolutionary potential. Thus, he continued, history repeats itself, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”¹ In a less dire mode, we might consider the presence of ancient tropes in Restoration discourse as evidence of the “invention of tradition,” the invocation of the past to legitimize and naturalize new political projects. But, in the case of the Meiji Restoration, there is yet another tension, beyond this concatenation of ancient and new. Not only did government fuse the glorification of the past with an embrace of radical change, it also reconciled a celebration of Japanese uniqueness with the adoption of new Western ideas and technologies. Thus, government discourse encompassed the dual tensions of “both new and ancient” and “both foreign and uniquely Japanese.”

These tensions were central to Restoration politics. Consider, for example, the establishment of the Japanese conscript army, unquestionably a cornerstone of the modern state. The 1872 imperial decree announcing conscription combined celebrations of the ancient and the modern, as well as the local and the international. The declaration has two parts: an imperial edict (*shōsho*), voiced in the Japanese imperial

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Collected Works of Marx and Engels* (New York: Progress Publishers, 1975), Vol. 11, pp. 103–104.

“we,” and a less rarified government edict (*kokuyū*). The edict opens with the emperor reflecting on Japan’s glorious past: in ancient times, the emperor himself would collect hardy young men from throughout the realm and lead them in defense of the state. Only in the “middle ages” did a distinction between farmer and soldier arise. Thus, the conscription of commoners and the elimination of samurai privilege were both parts of a return to a 1,000-year-old system of imperial rule. The conscription order itself describes this leveling of class distinctions in terms of new, Western-oriented notions of “freedom” and “rights.” “The four classes of the people are at long last receiving their right to freedom. This is the way to restore the balance between the high and the low and to grant equal rights to all.” Thus according to the Meiji state, the restoration of ancient national unity was fully consonant with Western natural rights discourse. Indeed, since Japan had neglected its own glorious tradition of a national conscript army, reviving that army would require the careful examination of Western models. Japan could best recover its own unique, ancient practices by working closely with Western advisors to implement new practices and technologies.²

Such documents suggest the limits of older concepts, such as “Westernization” and “modernization,” as well as the newer approach of “modernity.” The activists who toppled the shogunate acted, as Albert Craig observed over a half century ago, “in the name of old values,”³ but they produced a modern Western-style bureaucratic state. While some activists were dismayed by this turn of events, the Meiji government quickly removed “expel the barbarian” from the couplet “revere the emperor and expel the barbarian” in favor of diplomatic negotiations and parlor-room conversations with Western friends and associates. Texts such as the 1872 conscription decree reflect how the Meiji state, and Meiji-era discourse more broadly, contained a tension between a chauvinistic glorification of ancient Japan and the adoption of Western technologies and practices. That tension needs to be at the center of any analysis of the Restoration. What allowed Meiji discourse to harmonize “new” with “ancient” and “foreign” with “Japanese”?

One means of making sense of these tensions is to examine Meiji-era discourse and politics in the context of broader global processes: the

² For a superb, recent study of conscription see D. Colin Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier: Remaking Military Service in Nineteenth-century Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 105–130. An English translation of the imperial edict, strangely attributed to Yamagata Aritomo, can be found in Ryūsaku Tsunoda, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*, eds. Ryūsaku Tsunoda, William Theodore De Bary, and Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 703–705.

³ Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 360.

emergence of nationalism, and the concurrent surge in “invented traditions.” Benedict Anderson famously argued that nationalism is “‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”⁴ Thus we should expect Japanese nationalism to be, on the one hand, similar to other instances of the same nationalist base “module,” but, on the other, distinct as it was modified to fit local conditions. Japanese history and culture needed to be reconceptualized in order to fit into the global forms of nationalism and the nation-state. At the same time, however, Japanese nationalism needed to celebrate Japanese distinctiveness. Further, nationalism embodies a temporal contradiction, since it requires an instrumental ransacking of the historical record to justify the present moment. In the words of Ernest Renan, “forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation.”⁵ Anderson describes this phenomenon as one of the central paradoxes of nationalism: “the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.”⁶ Thus the Meiji state-building project required a selective appropriation of the Japanese past in order to fit Japanese history into a “module” of nationalism and the nation-state. The global norms of nationalism required a specific form of Japanese difference.

A coherent account of the Meiji Restoration requires foregrounding these contradictions. Indeed, the Restoration points to a tension within many theories of “modernity.” Because the nation-state and nationalism are central to most accounts of “modernity,” “modernity” itself must be both unitary and locally distinctive. Much as each nation must have its local inflection of the universal tropes of nationalism, so too must it have its own flavor of modernity. Thus, theorists have posited “multiple modernities,”⁷ “alternative modernities,”⁸ and “local modernities,”⁹ all in attempts to capture these inherent tensions. In the specific case of Japanese history, Carol Gluck has offered “modernity is not optional in

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), p. 4.

⁵ Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 11, from a speech delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882.

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 5.

⁷ Dominic Sachsenmaier and S. N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁸ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁹ Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow, eds., *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation, and the Nature of Cultural Change, Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

history, in that societies could not simply ‘choose’ another regime of historicity for themselves, for such is the tyranny of modern times.” Yet, at the same time, modernity is “not unitary or universal” and it is experienced differently in different places. Thus Gluck has posited “available modernities” and a “grammar of modernity,” invoking modernity as both potential and constraint.¹⁰

The Meiji Restoration is replete with examples of these tensions: global norms required the effacement of certain local practices but the celebration of others. A visually compelling example is the Meiji government’s paper currency. In 1873, the Meiji government released a new series of national bank notes, designed to celebrate the glories of the Japanese past. The ¥1 note, for example, showed the 1281 destruction of the Mongol fleet by a massive storm. The Mongols had conquered China and Korea, but Japan had driven back the invaders through a combination of samurai valor and divine intervention, specifically the *kamikaze*, a “divine storm” that sank the Mongol fleet. The ¥10 note showed the legendary Empress Jingū (CE 169–269) leading troops in the conquest of the Korean peninsula (see Figure 10.1). Her victory, according to ancient chronicles, was divinely decreed and she defeated enemy forces while pregnant with Ōjin, a future emperor. Ōjin’s willingness to delay his birth until his mother had finished her mission made Jingū a patron deity of midwives, but the ¥10 note emphasized her military prowess rather than safe childbirth.¹¹ In both cases, the iconography invoked well-known tropes of Japanese uniqueness, celebrated by Edo period nativists and Mito scholars. Japan alone has never been conquered by foreign invaders. Japan alone is the land of the gods, where empire is decreed by heavenly command.

Looking more closely, however, it is clear that the notes are neither “traditional” nor especially “Japanese.” The notes were actually engraved and printed in the United States by the Continental Bank Note Company: the new Meiji government wanted advanced technology to discourage counterfeiting, and modern copperplate printing was deemed far superior to traditional Japanese woodblocks. The notes also closely resemble United States National Bank Notes from the 1860s. The ¥10 note, for example, is similar in both theme and design to the \$10 United States National Bank Note, which depicts Hernando DeSoto’s “discovery” of the Mississippi (see Figure 10.2). Both the Japanese and US

¹⁰ Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 676.

¹¹ Melanie Trede, “Banknote Design as the Battlefield of Gender Politics and National Representation in Meiji Japan,” in *Performing “Nation”: Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880–1940*, eds. Joshua Mostow, Doris Croissant, and Catherine Yeh (Leiden: Brill, 2008).



Figure 10.1 1873 Japanese National Bank ¥10 note



Figure 10.2 US \$10 National Bank note, First National Bank, Bismarck, North Dakota

images establish a supernatural basis for the conquest of a neighboring territory. In the \$10 note, based on an oil painting by William Powell, DeSoto's conquest is linked to the US ideal of Manifest Destiny. The juxtaposition of the crucifix with naked “savages” suggests that DeSoto's subjugation of the Chickasaw and Muskogee was divinely ordained.¹² Empress Jingū's conquest of Korea is thus a Japanese counterpart to

¹² For the images on US National Bank notes, see Richard G. Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country: Images on 19th-Century U.S. Currency* (Raleigh, NC: Boson Books, 2004), pp. 189–194. For the invocation of the conquistadors in the development of manifest destiny see Matthew Baigell, “Territory, Race, Religion: Images of Manifest Destiny,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 3/4 (1990): 2–21.

Manifest Destiny. The 1873 ¥10 National Bank Note thus celebrated the uniqueness of Japan’s imperial destiny, but in a voice that echoed US claims to exceptionalism.

In similar fashion, the layout and theme of the \$1 note were templates for the ¥1 note (see Figures 10.3 and 10.4). Instead of a divine wind saving Japan from a Mongol invasion, the United States template showed the Puritans, arriving safely in Plymouth, shielded from a stormy sea by Providence. In both cases, divine forces saved those destined to found a new nation. Here too, the Japanese notes seem strangely derivative, as though the Continental Bank Note Company merely patched Japanese history into an American template. But this points to a tension inherent in



Figure 10.3 1873 Japanese National Bank ¥1 note



Figure 10.4 US \$1 National Bank note, First National Bank, Lebanon, Indiana

the “copying” of the technologies of nationalism. In order to emulate celebrations of American uniqueness, such as Manifest Destiny, Japanese banknotes needed to trumpet Japanese uniqueness. To be more like US models, Japanese notes needed to define and extol Japanese national identity.¹³

At a practical level, the two currency issues were similar because the Meiji government commissioned a US company to design and print the notes. But at a deeper level, both US and Japanese national banknotes reflected a broader global process: the creation of national currencies as part of the formation of new nation-states. We might call this “Westernization” but national currencies were new in the West as well. Indeed, the American templates were only ten years old, a product of the US Civil War. The very notion that a sovereign state should have a single and exclusive currency was itself a nineteenth-century innovation. Single and exclusive national currencies were developed as part of the broader nineteenth-century process of state formation and the construction of national identities.¹⁴

Prior to the nineteenth century, almost all states allowed the circulation of a broad range of public and private currencies. By one estimate, between 1790 and 1865 no fewer than 8,000 fiscal entities issued currency in the United States.¹⁵ Congress first authorized a national bank to issue paper money in 1791 (the First Bank of the United States), but it did not grant a monopoly on printing money. Thus, federal government notes circulated alongside privately printed currencies. Nonnational currencies increased after the charter of the Second Bank of the United States expired in 1837. In the absence of a national bank and under lax federal banking laws, a wide range of institutions issued paper money: states, cities, counties, private banks, railroads, stores, churches, and individuals. Unlike later national currencies, these notes were commonly decorated with emblems evoking wealth or beauty, rather than portraits of national heroes. A \$3 bill issued by Drover’s Bank in Salt Lake City, for example, featured cattle, while a \$10 note from Mechanics Bank in Tennessee featured, not surprisingly, mechanics. Other popular images included beautiful and elegant women,

¹³ For a brief discussion of nationalism and Meiji banknotes, see Tōno Haruyuki, “Meiji shonen no kokuritsu ginkō shihei o meguru Kikuchi Yōsai to Ishii Teiko: ‘Zenken kojitsu’ o tegakari to shite” [On the Connection between the Design of National Banknotes in Early Meiji Era with the Painter Yōsai Kikuchi and Teiko Ishii: Using Ancient Sages and Customs as Cues], *Bunkazai gaku* 29, no. 3 (2011): 9–10.

¹⁴ Eric Helleiner, “Historicizing Territorial Currencies: Monetary Space and the Nation-State in North America,” *Political Geography* 18 (1999): 100–120.

¹⁵ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, p. 8.

steamboats, railroads, factories, and prosperous farms.¹⁶ These notes were commonly denominated in dollars, but were discounted based on local assessments of market value. Thus, a \$3 bill issued by Drover's Bank in Salt Lake City would be worth less than face value in Alabama or New York. Arguing in favor of a national banking system, Senator John Sherman of Ohio lamented:

[T]he different States were as to their bank notes so many foreign nations each refusing the paper of the other, except at continually varying rates of discount. Frequently there was a greater loss on paper taken or sent from an eastern to a western State than on English bank notes converted into Austrian money in Vienna. Only adepts and regular money changers could tell whether a note was current or not, the paper of broken or suspended banks remaining in circulation long after their value had departed.¹⁷

The antebellum American monetary system was thus surprisingly similar to its Japanese counterpart. While the Tokugawa shogunate had minted a range of gold, silver, and copper coins, these circulated alongside a wide range of paper currencies. Domains, liege vassals (*hatamoto*), temples, and shrines all issued their own paper notes. On the eve of the Meiji Restoration, over 1,600 forms of paper money were circulating in Japan.¹⁸ As with antebellum American notes, the iconography of Tokugawa-era paper money featured images of wealth and beauty rather than national history. The gods of wealth, Ebisu and Daikokuten, were popular, as were more abstract symbols of prosperity, such as dragons and phoenixes. The texts on the notes did not mention a Japanese state. There was no need since the notes' circulation was primarily local and they were used exclusively within the Japanese realm. Instead, text on the notes specified the purpose of the issue and conditions of convertibility. A note from Sakami Temple in Harima Province, for example, explained that it was issued to pay for a construction project. A note issued by the Satō liege vassal house in Yamato Province (present-day Nara Prefecture) specified that it could be redeemed by a designated merchant: Higami Magoemon. The iconography and text of these currencies sought to convey a sense of stable value, rather than to extol a glorious history

¹⁶ For a survey of images, see Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco has an excellent digital exhibition of historical currencies. See "American Currency Exhibit," Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, www.frbsf.org/education/teacher-resources/american-currency-exhibit.

¹⁷ Andrew McFarland Davis, *The Origin of the National Banking System* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), pp. 14–15. Sherman is today best known for the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890.

¹⁸ Hugh T. Patrick, "External Equilibrium and Internal Convertibility: Financial Policy in Meiji Japan," *Journal of Economic History* 25, no. 2 (1965): 192–194.

of the issuer.¹⁹ Finally, as with antebellum US currency, these notes circulated outside their place of issue, but often at a discount, and enterprising merchants profited through arbitrage, exploiting these spatial variations in value.²⁰

In both the US and Japanese cases, the creation of a national financial system, with a single currency, was an element of a broader project of state-building and national unification. As Eric Helleiner has observed, national currency regimes were part of a wider reconceptualization of state power. States had long used coins as tangible representations of the crown, but only in the nineteenth century did states become powerful enough to compel the exclusive use of single currency within their territories. Under legal tender laws, the state could “force people to use whatever money the state declared to be valid.” At the same time, a succession of advances in printing technology, such as steam-powered plate printing and then electrotyping, made forgery vastly more difficult. Technology thus emboldened states to assert that trust in their paper currency was analogous to trust in the state itself. In that way, national currencies were part of broader projects to foster national identity. An American proponent of a single national currency argued that: “every citizen” who uses “a currency which will be equal to gold through every foot of our territory . . . would feel and realize, every time he handled or looked at such a bill bearing the national mark, that the union of these states is verily a personal benefit and blessing to all.”²¹

The images on national currencies were chosen to support such nation-building projects. The iconography of the US National Bank Notes of 1863, for example, was part of an explicit project to inculcate nationalism. Writing to the Secretary of the Treasury in 1863, Spencer M. Clark, the head of the National Currency Bureau, outlined this project in detail:

A series properly selected, with their subject titles imprinted on the notes, would tend to teach the masses the prominent periods in our country’s history. The laboring man who should receive every Saturday night, a copy of the “Surrender of Burgoyne” for his weekly wages, would soon inquire who General Burgoyne was, and to whom he surrendered. His curiosity would be aroused and he would learn the facts from a fellow laborer or from his employer. The same would be true

¹⁹ Nihon Ginkō Chōsa Kyoku, ed., *Zuroku Nihon no kahei* [Japanese Currency Illustrated], Vol. 6, *Kinsei shinyō kahei no hattatsu 2* [The Development of Credit Currency in the Early Modern Period 2] (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1975), images 6 and 205. See also the commentaries of pp. 90, 101.

²⁰ Higaki Norio, “Hansatsu no hatashita yakuwari to mondaiten” [The Roles and Problems of Domain Currencies], *Kinyū kenkyū* 8, no. 1 (1991): 136–138.

²¹ Eric Helleiner, *The Making of National Money: Territorial Currencies in Historical Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 42–61, 100–139, quote from p. 111.

of other National pictures, and in time many would be taught leading incidents in our country's history, so that they would soon be familiar to those who would never read them in books, teaching them history and imbuing them with a National feeling.²²

The final selection of images on US currency reflects this project of using bank notes as passive national history textbooks. In addition to the scenes noted above (De Soto, the Pilgrims, and the Surrender of Burgoyne), the notes featured the arrival of Columbus, the baptism of Pocahontas, and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In short, the notes constituted a metanarrative in which the unity and greatness of the American nation was presaged by the arrival of the first European Christians. Ironically, the Surrender of Burgoyne was placed on the \$500 note, which was unlikely to be handled by a "laboring man" receiving his "weekly wage." Overall, however, the 1863 series was designed both to foster and to celebrate a new level of national unity.

The Meiji government copied both the US financial system and its use of imagery to promote national unity. The surviving record on the design of the 1873 Japanese National Bank Notes is fragmentary, but it is clear that the Meiji government was emulating the new practice of using currency to disseminate a nationalist iconography. Writing from Washington, DC in 1871, where he was negotiating with the Continental Bank Note Company, Inoue Kaoru described the sort of images Japan should put on its currency: "please send pictures of famous ancient heroes and great men." Japanese officials in Washington had already received serviceable images of the ancient conquest of Korea and the sun goddess Amaterasu emerging from the Rock Cave of Heaven (as told in the ancient chronicle, the *Kojiki*), but Inoue wanted at least six or seven more images. He suggested that appropriate images could include depictions of the sinking of the Mongol invasion fleet in the late thirteenth century, and Kusunoki Masashige welcoming the return of Emperor Go-Daigo from exile in the early fourteenth century. Inoue discouraged depicting current or recent government officials, since such images, unlike those of ancient heroes, would not "bring the blessings of enlightenment" to the Japanese people.²³

²² "Exec. Doc. no. 50: Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury in Answer to a Resolution of the House of January 24, in Regard to the Printing Bureau of the Treasury Department," in *Executive Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives, During the Second Session of the Thirty-eighth Congress, 1864-65* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865).

²³ Meiji Zaiseishi Hensankai, *Meiji zaiseishi* [History of Meiji Financial Administration], Vol. 14 (Tokyo: Meiji Zaiseishi Hakkōjo, 1926-28), pp. 287-289. See also Nihon Ginkō Chōsa Kyoku, *Zuroku Nihon no kahei* [Japanese Currency Illustrated], Vol. 7,

There are no surviving records detailing Inoue's deliberations with the Continental Bank Note Company on currency design. But it is clear that Japanese leaders were engaged in ongoing discussions with Western experts on how to develop a Japanese national iconography. As John Breen notes elsewhere in this volume, the Meiji state sought to situate the Japanese emperor in a transnational hierarchy of monarchs, and proper iconography was central to that project. As late as 1890, the Japanese finance ministry was repeatedly asking its representative in Berlin to ascertain whether Germany's new currency depicted the country's reigning monarch.²⁴ There is also a detailed surviving record of parallel discussions over the iconography of postage stamps. In 1873, officials at the Home Ministry (*Naimushō*) sent recommendations for stamp design to the Council of State (*Dajōkan*). They suggested adopting Western printing techniques and featuring faces on the stamps, so as to prevent counterfeiting. Further, since the stamps would circulate overseas, they needed to showcase the advancement of industry in Japan. The Home Ministry also reported that many foreign stamps featured the face of the country's king, people of great renown, and sometimes the head of the national post office. Accordingly, they asked if Japanese stamps should feature the faces of current Japanese government officials.

The Council of State consulted with Georges Bousquet, a French jurist employed primarily as a legal advisor. Bousquet rebutted many of the Home Ministry's assertions. The use of faces on stamps was not, in fact, an effective anticounterfeiting measure. Color and detailed pattern were more difficult to copy. As for the images of people on stamps, Bousquet advised against depicting any living person besides the monarch. Western practice was to feature only two types of personage: kings, who either founded the empire or restored its lost glory, and well-known heroes who rendered great service to the realm. Current officials should not be featured, since they might be dismissed, making the stamps an embarrassment. As an example, Bousquet noted that even Bismarck himself did not appear on German stamps.²⁵

Kindai heisei no seiritsu [The Formation of the Modern Monetary System] (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1975), pp. 310–321.

²⁴ Gaimushō, “Doitsukoku shihei ni dōkoku kōtei no gazō satsunyū no yūmu torishirabekata ōkura daijin yori irai no ken” [Finding Out Whether the German Emperor Is Depicted on German Paper Currency: Requests by the Finance Minister], B11090590900 (National Archives of Japan).

²⁵ Takahashi Zenshichi, *Oyatoi gaikokujin: tsūshin* [Hired Foreign Experts: Correspondence] (Tokyo: Kajima Kenkyūjo Shuppankai, 1969), pp. 120–121; Yūseishō Yūsei kenkyūjo Shozoku Shiryōkan, *Yūbin kütte rui enkakushi* [The Past and Present of Postal Stamp Types] (Tokyo: Yūseishō Yūsei kenkyūjo Shozoku Shiryōkan, 1996), p. 67.

This engagement with Western iconographies was part of a broader effort to fit Japanese culture into a new transnational frame. The concepts of “modernization” and “modernity” are not helpful here, since much of this engagement involved non- or antimodern practices. The Meiji state dissolved the samurai status hierarchy but, as Breen notes in his chapter, it promptly created a new peerage and sought to situate the Japanese emperor in a global hierarchy of monarchs. Making Japan modern involved creating new emblems to trumpet the Emperor Meiji’s links to the ancient past.

The development of a Japanese banknote iconography reflected these tensions: celebrating Japanese uniqueness without making it too “Asiatic” or exotic. Images on currency needed to be “ancient,” “famous,” and heroic, but roughly analogous to Western models. Those criteria resulted in the celebration of some Japanese heroes, but the effacement of others. The sun goddess Amaterasu, for example, was part of early discussions, but she disappeared in the later stages of note design. Inoue specifically mentioned having received from Japan a painting of Amaterasu emerging from the Rock Cave of Heaven, and he deemed the image ready for engraving. But Amaterasu does not appear on any of the 1873 notes: she must have been removed after Inoue presented the image to engravers in Washington. Intriguingly, many official Japanese government publications follow Inoue’s initial plan and report that the Rock Cave appears on the face of the ¥10 note, although the actual image is of Japanese musicians.²⁶ Only in a 2001 publication by the Japanese Currency Museum is the image described simply as a musical performance. What happened to Amaterasu? Why was she included and then removed from Japanese currency?

Inoue’s reasons to include Amaterasu on Japanese currency are obvious: she was a well-known and revered national figure. During the Shinto revival of the Edo period, pilgrimages to the Sun Goddess shrine at Ise became a mass movement. In ordinary years, roughly 300,000 pilgrims traveled to Ise, but there were three mass pilgrimages, approximately on the sexagenary cycle of the Chinese zodiac: 1705, 1771, and 1830–1831. At least 2 million pilgrims visited Ise in 1705 and 1771, and roughly 5 million in 1830–1831. These mass pilgrimages had a broad effect on society and the economy. Roads were clogged, inns were full, and river porters were overwhelmed. Because of the religious nature of their travel, pilgrims had an especially powerful claim to alms, even when they indulged in revelry such as ecstatic dancing. Travel to Ise also

²⁶ Meiji Zaiseishi Hensankai, *Meiji zaiseishi* [History of Meiji Financial Administration], Vol. 13 (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1904–1905), pp. 292–293.

provided a pretext to challenge social norms: women, children, servants, farmhands, and apprentices left spontaneously and surreptitiously without the permission of their husbands, parents, masters, or lords.²⁷

Images of Amaterasu and Ise were accordingly prominent in popular culture. The famous landscape artist Andō Hiroshige, for example, featured Ise in multiple prints of “famous places,” as well as prints focused specifically on pilgrimage. Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III) produced at least two prints focused on Amaterasu’s emergence from the cave, surrounded by other gods of the Plain of High Heaven.²⁸ Hokusai, with his characteristic flair for innovation, published a diorama. By carefully cutting along the lines of his two-part print, consumers could create a three-dimensional model of Amaterasu’s emergence from the cave.²⁹

Despite such domestic popularity, the image of Amaterasu and the Rock Cave of Heaven did not fit with international norms of national heroes. Consider, for example, the backstory to Amaterasu’s reappearance. The Sun Goddess and her brother Susa-no-o, the Wind God, engaged in a childbearing contest. When Susan-no-o won, through his greater ability to procreate, he became wild and disrespectful. He destroyed Amaterasu’s rice fields and defecated in her sacred spaces. In a final escalation of his rampage, he ripped open the roof of her Sacred Weaving Hall and threw in a flayed pony. That offense so startled Amaterasu’s weaver that she struck her genitals on her loom shuttle and died. In response, Amaterasu fled into the Rock Cave of Heaven, plunging the High Plain of Heaven into darkness. Myriad deities then collaborated on an elaborate plan to lure Amaterasu out of the cave. They uprooted a tree and decorated it with specially crafted cloth and beads, as well as a newly forged mirror. Then the deity, Amenouzume no Mikoto, stood in front of the cave, entered a shamanistic trance, exposed her breasts and genitals, and began dancing. The assembled gods responded with uproarious laughter and this confused Amaterasu. “Because I have shut myself in, I thought that Takamanohara would be dark, and that the Central Land of the Reed Plains would be completely dark. . . . But why is it that Amenouzume sings and dances, and all the eight-hundred myriad [sic] deities laugh?” Amenouzume responded, “We rejoice and dance because there is here a deity superior to you.” The assembled gods then brought the

²⁷ Winston Davis, “Pilgrimage and World Renewal: A Study of Religion and Social Values in Tokugawa Japan, Part I,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 2 (1983); Winston Davis, “Pilgrimage and World Renewal: A Study of Religion and Social Values in Tokugawa Japan, Part II,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (1984); Laura Nenzi, “To Ise at All Costs: Religious and Economic Implications of Early Modern Nukemairi,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006).

²⁸ Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) Boston, Massachusetts, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, Accession number 11.22318-20.

²⁹ MFA, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, Accession numbers 11.20433 and 11.20434.

mirror close to the Rock Cave door. Amaterasu, apparently unable to recognize her own reflection, approached the mirror with curiosity and was grabbed and pulled out by Amenotajikarao-no-Kami, who was hiding by the door. With Amaterasu's emergence, the heavens were again illuminated by her light, and the assembled deities then barred the Sun Goddess from returning to the cave, marking off the entrance with a sacred rope. The deities also agreed to punish Susa-no-o with a "thousand tables of restitutive gifts, and also, cutting off his beard and the nails of his hands and feet, had him exorcised and expelled with a divine expulsion."³⁰

While there is no surviving record of Inoue Kaoru's conversations with the Continental Bank Note Company, nineteenth-century Western discussions of Japanese mythology suggest why the Rock Cave of Heaven image was rejected. Rather than inspiring awe or reverence, for Western audiences, the Rock Cave of Heaven legend suggested the primitive and underdeveloped nature of Japanese religion. Writing in 1877, for example, the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor attempted to situate the *Kojiki* in his theories of world religion. Amaterasu and the Rock Cave of Heaven thus became "in a very clear and perfect form, the nature-myth of the Sun driven into hiding by the storm and peeping out from her cloud-cave, when presently the great cloud is rolled away like a rock from a cave's mouth."³¹ For Tylor, such myths were part of a deep-seated human desire to explain the natural world, and he insisted that practices from "earlier and ruder stages of culture" could provide insight into "some of the deepest and most vital points of our intellectual, industrial, and social state."³² Such natural myths were, in essence, the forerunners of modern scientific inquiry. At the same time, however, Tylor took an evolutionary view of culture, and he associated nature myths with "primitive" culture: "savage minds" and "barbaric education" produced "childlike devices" to explain the world. Within Tylor's schema, the crude animism of creation myths was supposed to evolve, eventually into increased abstraction, culminating in a coherent moral code and a single supreme deity. Japanese mythology, however, was the product of a more primitive state of human development.³³

³⁰ *Kojiki*, Book One, Chapters 15–17, trans. Donald L. Philippi, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 76–86 with reference to Gustav Heldt, *The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 22–25.

³¹ Edward B. Tylor, "Remarks on Japanese Mythology," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 6 (1877), 57.

³² Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, Vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1871), pp. 401–402.

³³ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, esp. Vol. 2, pp. 401–410. For a thoughtful evaluation of Tylor, see Martin D. Stringer, "Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of Our Discipline," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 4 (1999): 541–556.

Nineteenth-century Japanese specialists followed Tylor's schema, and contrasted the simplicity of Japanese mythology with more sophisticated religious forms. W. G. Aston, who translated the *Chronicles of Japan* [*Nihon shoki*] into English, saw the odd anthropomorphism of Japanese gods as a sign of Japanese cultural inferiority. Japanese deities, he wrote, "are for the most part personified powers, elements and objects of nature," but there is no sense of a more developed, abstract sense of the divine. Amaterasu:

although the most eminent of the Shinto Gods, is grossly insulted by Susa no wo, and instead of inflicting on him the punishment which he deserves, hides in a cave from which she is partly enticed, partly dragged by the other deities. This is not the behaviour of a Supreme Being.

The Rock Cave of Heaven story thus highlighted precisely the forms of "otherness" the Meiji state wished to rebut: Japan as morally and intellectually underdeveloped. Indeed, Aston felt compelled to insist that, despite the crudeness of Japanese mythology, "it does not follow that the ancient Japanese were backward in their general intellectual development."³⁴ Faced with such a Western reception, the Rock Cave of Heaven was reduced to an innocuous image of traditional musicians. That image was nominally related to ancient mythology, since the gods' performance before the Rock Cave of Heaven is considered the origins of Japanese music. But, unlike a direct depiction of the myth, it did not raise questions of why the Japanese gods might indulge in whimsical cruelty or deceit.

Instead of the Rock Cave of Heaven, Japanese currency featured legends that offered divine support for modern Japanese territoriality. The ¥20 notes, for example, featured the Wind God, Susa-no-o, and Yamata no Orochi, an eight-headed dragon, or more literally an "eight-branched giant snake." Like the story of the Rock Cave of Heaven, the Wind God's defeat of the dragon was well known in popular culture, with prints by Utagawa Toyokuni,³⁵ Tsukioka Yoshitoshi,³⁶ and Toyohara Chikanobu, as well as depictions on sword scabbards. In the *Kojiki* version of the tale, Susa-no-o descends to earth and hears of a massive and terrifying serpent, with eight heads and eight tails, stretching across eight valleys and eight mountain peaks, and with a belly oozing blood. Susa-no-o learns that the serpent has been terrorizing the locals and eating their daughters. He contrives to defeat the monster by getting it

³⁴ W. G. Aston, "Japanese Myth," *Folklore* 10, no. 3 (1899): 294–324.

³⁵ Tokyo National Museum, Registration numbers C0073788, A-10569_5083, A-10569_5084.

³⁶ British Museum, Registration number 2008,3037.01003.

drunk with eight vats of strong wine, one for each head. Susa-no-o then cuts off each of the eight heads and when cutting off one of the eight tails, his own sword breaks on a sword encased within the tail. Susa-no-o takes this broadsword, named Kusanagi (lit. “grass scythe”), and offers it to Amaterasu. It later becomes part of the three sacred regalia of the Japanese imperial house, along with the mirror and special curved jewels that were hung before the Rock Cave of Heaven.³⁷

Like the story of the Rock Cave of Heaven, the legend of Susa-no-o and the eight-headed dragon is full of inconsistencies. Kusanagi, for example, is found in the serpent’s “middle” tail, although, since eight is an even number, the dragon cannot have a middle tail. The sudden transformation of Susa-no-o from a violent and dangerous rebel into a loyal hero points to the hybrid nature of the *Kojiki* as a fusion of independent mythic traditions. But the story of Kusanagi also includes a reconciliation of those different traditions: Susa-no-o offers Kusanagi to Amaterasu, symbolizing the submission of ancient noble houses to the imperial line. Most important, Susa-no-o’s encounter with the dragon could be integrated with internationally established tropes of supernatural intervention and sovereignty. The connection between possession of a mystical sword and a sovereign’s right to rule was, for example, common to the *Kojiki* and Arthurian legend. There are two popular versions of the tale of King Arthur and his sword Excalibur. In the first, the king’s right to rule is confirmed when he alone is able to pull Excalibur from a stone. Alternately, an enchantress, the Lady of the Lake, saves a wounded King Arthur and bequeathes him the sword.³⁸ The sacred swords Excalibur and Kusanagi both symbolize and establish royal legitimacy.

Dragon slaying was also a part of European iconographies of state power. The legend of St. George, for example, bears a striking resemblance to the story of Susa-no-o. In both cases, the hero finds a land in which terrified people feed their own children to a monstrous snake/serpent/dragon, and the hero proceeds to kill the beast with special weapons and to take as his wife a local noble’s daughter. As part of the transformation of an earlier pagan hero into a Christian saint, George first wounds the dragon with his lance, and then asks that the locals be baptized, before slaying the dragon with his sword. The veneration of St. George was common across Europe and images of George and the dragon appeared on European coats of arms and official insignia from Moscow to London. The English national flag is based on St. George’s

³⁷ *Kojiki*, Book One, Chapter 19, trans. Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 88–90 with reference to Heldt, *The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters*, pp. 25–27.

³⁸ For a survey of Arthurian legend, see Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, eds., *Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

cross, and the red cross in the British Union flag represents England as part of the United Kingdom.³⁹ The story of Susa-no-o and the eight-headed snake thus fit neatly as a “module” of Japanese national identity. It was distinctly Japanese but also neatly analogous to Western national legends. Susa-no-o was therefore accessible as a “Japanese St. George,” foreign and different, yet recognizable as a national hero.⁴⁰

Modular nationalism thus precluded some forms of alterity while promoting Japanese legends involving honor, loyalty, valor, and divine intervention, especially those that legitimized Japanese territoriality and sovereign legitimacy.⁴¹ The face of the ¥2 note, for example, featured the celebrated imperial loyalist Nitta Yoshisada (1301–1338). Nitta is shown casting his sword into the sea before attacking the Hōjō in Kamakura in 1333 on behalf of Emperor Go-Daigo. According to the *Taiheiki*, since the land approaches to Kamakura were well-defended, Nitta cast his sword into the sea and prayed to the gods to part the waters and create a beachhead fan, Cape Inamura. “I have heard,” declared Nitta, “that the Sun Goddess of Ise, the founder of the land of Japan, conceals her true being in the august image of Vairochana Buddha, and that she has appeared in this world in the guise of a dragon-god of the blue ocean . . . let the eight dragon-gods on the inner and outer seas look upon my loyalty; let them roll back the tides a myriad [sic] league distant to open the way for my hosts.”⁴² In Nitta’s understanding of Amaterasu, she appears in many guises, and is thus both omnipresent and hidden. Further, she acts in the present to reward loyalty to the imperial house.

Like the story of Susa-no-o and the snake/dragon, the story of Nitta and Amaterasu served the dual criteria of being uniquely Japanese but running parallel to Western analogues. There were numerous Western examples of divine intervention to turn the tide of battle, including God slowing the passage of time for both Joshua at Jericho and Charlemagne at Roncesvalles (Rencesvals). Thus, a story of Amaterasu creating a beachhead at Inamura for her loyal servant, Nitta Yoshisada, could be fit into an emerging global corpus of national mythologies. Amaterasu hiding in a cave confirmed Orientalist conceits about Japanese underdevelopment, but Amaterasu changing the tides for Nitta Yoshisada established parallels between Japanese culture and the “civilized” West.

³⁹ For an overview of St. George legends, see Samantha Riches, *St. George: Hero, Martyr, and Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000).

⁴⁰ For Susa-no-o as St. George, see J. Edward Kidder, Jr., *Himiko and Japan’s Elusive Chieftom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History, and Mythology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), p. 286.

⁴¹ The term “modular” nationalism derives from Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁴² Hōshi Kojima, *The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan*, trans. Helen Craig McCullough (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 289–291.

This seemingly narrow case of Meiji currency iconography thus reveals broader tensions within Meiji nationalism and the construction of the Meiji nation-state. On the one hand, the removal of Amaterasu from Meiji currency was part of a broader abandonment of pre-Meiji political aspirations. Nativists, for example, had hoped that the Restoration would bring about a return to ancient patterns of rule and a concomitant disappearance of the state. They envisioned that as ancient rituals drew together ordinary people, the imperial house and the gods themselves would achieve a primal unity. Those utopian hopes, reflected in the slogan, the “Union of Ritual and Rule” (*saisei itchi*), emerged from a belief in Japan’s fundamental and essential difference from all other cultures. Almost all foreign influences, even the Chinese writing system, were viewed as potential perversions of an essential Japanese nature. But that vision of a stateless, organic unity of the Japanese people and their gods was ill suited to the nineteenth-century world system. Rather than dissolve the Japanese state into a network of local shrines, the Meiji government relied on Western advisors to create a newly powerful, highly centralized nation-state. The constraints of “modular” nationalism and the nation-state precluded a popular and compelling vision of how the Japanese past might shape the Japanese future.⁴³

This disappearance of Amaterasu thus supports the argument that, for most of the world, nationalism and the nation-state are foreign political forms that preclude alternative political paths. As Partha Chatterjee has argued, nationalist aspirations in the colonial world require a contradictory move: a celebration of local culture as a distinctive mark of identity, but also a rejection of that culture as an obstacle to progress. For Chatterjee, nationalist thought is “a particular manifestation of a much more general problem . . . the bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge, established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real and not merely metaphorical sense, a colonial domination.” Thus, nationalists in the developing world “challenged the colonial claim to political domination” but also “accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based.”⁴⁴ In the Japanese case, the disappearance of Amaterasu represents how

⁴³ For the utopian aspirations of nativism, see Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986), pp. 1–35.

Japanese culture was self-censored based on Western standards of “rational” discourse and Western precedents for national heroes.

At the same time, the Meiji case seems to substantiate the claim that nationalism and the nation-state are universal forms. Setting aside Amaterasu and the Rock Cave of Heaven, there were numerous images from Japanese popular culture that meshed easily with the criteria of “modular” nationalism. Indeed, by the 1890s, “the way of the samurai” (bushido), once a marker of samurai status, was reworked as a nationalist ideology, the common heritage of all Japanese subjects.⁴⁵ It is thus difficult to argue that Meiji nationalism was a failure. On the contrary, by the early 1900s, Meiji nationalism was so successful that anxious Westerners began wondering how they might reimport it from Japan. Victory in the Russo-Japanese War, and the reinvention of bushido as a national creed, convinced Western observers that Japanese nationalism was not a faulty derivative of Western nationalism, but a new and improved model. Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement, extolled the Japanese as models of modern patriotism and self-sacrifice.⁴⁶ Japanese patriotism, according to Baden-Powell, stemmed from their “upper classes learning, as boys, the chivalry of their forefathers the Samurai (or knights of Japan).”⁴⁷ The Boy Scout movement was designed, in no small part, to bring Japanese models of national service to Britain. Advocates of “national efficiency” argued that Britain should emulate Japan in order to stem its decline.⁴⁸ One of the most imaginative examples of that new assessment of Japan was H. G. Wells’ *Modern Utopia*, featuring a “voluntary nobility,” known as the “samurai,” who rule a utopian society on a distant planet.⁴⁹ Thus, not only Japanese subjects, but also Westerners observers, were seduced by the conceit that the Japanese nation was natural, timeless, and organic. “Forgetting,” as Renan observed, or even “historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.”⁵⁰ In the Japanese case, however, such historical amnesia

⁴⁵ Mark Ravina, “The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, Seppuku and the Politics of Legend,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2010): 691–721.

⁴⁶ Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, *Boy Scouts Beyond the Seas; “My World Tour”* (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1913), pp. 86–100; Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), pp. 125–130.

⁴⁷ Baden-Powell, *Eton College Chronicle*, December 2, 1904, p. 600 quoted in Michael Rosenthal, “Knights and Retainers: The Earliest Version of Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout Scheme,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 4 (1980), 605.

⁴⁸ G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 57–59.

⁴⁹ H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967, originally published 1905).

⁵⁰ Renan, “What Is a Nation,” p. 11.

was global in scope. The very nations that, in the 1850s and 1860s, imposed unequal treaties on a “backwards” nation became enthralled by the power of the Japanese nation-state and its organic unity with its people.

This new appreciation of Japan was marked in both practical and symbolic registers. Through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, the United Kingdom and Japan recognized their common interest in opposing Russian ambitions. Notably, the treaty was the first formal alliance between an independent Asian power and a European country against a European rival. Over the same period, British royalty embraced the Emperor Meiji as a peer. As Breen notes, Edward VII was the first British monarch to exchange honors with the Japanese imperial house. The Emperor Meiji bestowed the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum in 1902 and received the Order of the Garter in 1906. Japan now had a seat at a Eurocentric table.

Making sense of the Meiji Restoration requires engaging this tension: confronting the degree to which Western norms, such as nationalism and the nation-state, were both constraining and empowering. For Meiji-era ideologues, the Japanese past offered ample precedent for the construction of a Japanese nation-state and the iconography of Japanese paper money suggests how visualizations of the Japanese past were marshaled on behalf of that project. Meiji era ideologues quickly mastered the “grammar of modernity,” to borrow Carol Gluck’s phrase, and began speaking fluent Japanese within the confines of that grammar. The price of that mastery was an effacement of alternative visions of Japanese identities, as emblemized by the consignment of the Rock Cave of Heaven to a “primitive” Japanese past.