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Before the Nation

KOKUGAKU AND

THE IMAGINING

OF COMMUNITY

IN EARLY MODERN

JAPAN

SUSAN L. BURNS

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Before the Nation

Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society

Editors: Rey Chow, H. D. Harootunian, and Masao Miyoshi

A STUDY OF THE WEATHERHEAD EAST ASIAN INSTITUTE

SUSAN L. BURNS

Before the Nation

Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community

in Early Modern Japan

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Durham and London

2003

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STUDIES OF THE WEATHERHEAD EAST ASIAN
INSTITUTE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Weatherhead East Asian Institute is Columbia University's center for research, publication, and teaching on modern and contemporary Asia Pacific regions. The Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute were inaugurated in 1962 to bring to a wider public the results of significant new research on modern and contemporary East Asia.

To Hannah

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Acknowledgments

This book has its origins in a seminar paper I submitted to Professor Harry Harootunian and Professor Tetsuo Najita in 1986, my first year of graduate school at the University of Chicago. During the past sixteen years as I have worked—and at times struggled—to complete this project, I have been reminded again and again of how much I have learned from them. I continue to be profoundly grateful for the vital intellectual community they created at the University of Chicago during my years there and for the support they have provided me since then. I am indebted as well to Koyasu Nobukuni, now Professor Emeritus of Osaka University. During the two and half years I spent at Osaka University, Professor Koyasu allowed me to participate fully in his graduate seminar. He and his students, especially Miyagawa Yasuko and Higuchi Kōzō, made it possible for me to engage with the *kokugaku* canon in ways that would not have been possible on my own. William Sibley guided my first early efforts to read Norinaga's work, while Naoki Sakai patiently endured my stumbling early efforts to read the work of Fujitani Mitsue.

I owe much to the colleagues and friends who carefully and critically read the manuscript in its many postdissertation forms and forced me to rethink, reformulate, and refine my ideas and my prose. These include Leslie Pincus, Herman Ooms, Peter Nosco, and Anne Walthall, as well as my dear former colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin, Edward Rhoads, Margherita Zanasi, and Cynthia Talbot. The members of the Kinsei Shisōshi Kenkyūkai, based in Kyoto, provided a much needed forum for me to test out my work, and I benefited greatly from their comments and suggestions. Thanks to Barbara Brooks and Sally Hastings for their friendship, encouragement, and support, and to Carol Gluck and Madge Huntington, who guided me through the process toward publication. I am grateful as well for the help of Reynolds Smith, Justin Faerber, and the others at Duke University Press for their help during the publication process.

The research for this work was conducted with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Grant in 1989–1990 and a Japan Foundation Dissertation Grant in 1990–1991. A Whiting Foundation Grant supported a year of dissertation writing in 1991–1992, and a grant from the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago provided support in the summer of 1992. The support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science made it possible for me to complete my revisions in 1998–2000.

I am profoundly grateful to my family for their love and support during the long years of this book's gestation. Thanks to my parents, Frank and Shirley Burns, for teaching me the value of hard work and determination and for being exemplary grandparents, and to my sister, Barbara, for managing my affairs each and every time I depart for Japan. Finally, thanks to my daughter, Hannah, for being a great kid and my inspiration. This book is for her.

Introduction

Between Community and the Nation

In 1764 in the town of Matsuzaka in Ise province, a physician and part-time teacher of poetry and poetics took up the study of a then obscure work. His name was Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), and the text that came to consume him was the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*). Dated to 712, the *Kojiki* tells of the creation of the Japanese islands by heavenly deities, the sun deity's command that her grandchild rule over these islands, and the process by which his descendants established and extended their rule as emperors. Today the *Kojiki* is regarded as a legitimating device produced by the early imperial court, but Norinaga argued that this work, the earliest extant text written in Japan, recorded oral transmissions handed down from the formative moment of his country and thus revealed the reality of an original and authentic Japan. For more than thirty years he labored over the exegesis of the *Kojiki*, moving character by character, line by line, producing an annotated version of the text that he called the *Kojikiden* (*Commentaries on the Kojiki*). In the *Kojikiden*, Norinaga argued that the *Kojiki*, correctly read, revealed that Japan—or *sumeramikuni* (the imperial land) as he termed it—had once been a harmonious community in which subject and ruler had lived in perfect communion with each other and with the deities, with no need for laws, institutions, principles, doctrines, or norms. This natural community gradually disappeared, however, after the beginning of cultural contact with China led to the introduction of flawed forms of knowledge in the form of Confucianism and Buddhism. Exposed to ethical principles and political theories, the Japanese people “lost” the capacity to relate to one another immediately and authentically. The result of the new self-consciousness that emerged was a society marked by discord and conflict, in which social relations were founded on coercion and force. Norinaga asserted that by stripping away these alien influences, it would be possible to recover the “real” Japan, the idyllic community of the past.

The *Kojikiden* sent shock waves through the intellectual circles of late Tokugawa Japan, which included Neo-Confucianists, Ancient Studies Confucianists, Shintoists associated with the Suika and Yoshida schools, and practitioners of what was known as *wagaku* or “Japanese studies.” From the time chapters of this work began to circulate in the 1780s, and even more so after 1790, when its publication began, Norinaga met with both criticism and acclaim. His readers were astounded by his knowledge of the *Kojiki*, even as they were intrigued, confused, or angered by his claims about its meaning. Critics were many, but so too were converts. At the time of his death, Norinaga’s school in Matsuzaka, known as the Suzuya, had almost five hundred students drawn from forty-three provinces, and he was recognized as the leader of the new intellectual practice that had come to be called *kokugaku* (the study of our country), a term coined to differentiate it from *kangaku* (Chinese studies).¹

Like Norinaga, those who associated themselves with this new discourse took up the study of the handful of texts written in Japan in the eighth and ninth centuries and argued that these were central to understanding the nature of Japan as society, culture, and the source of individual identity. Through repeated acts of interpretation, they attempted to discover the nature of the community that they claimed had existed before writing, history, and memory. Thus *kokugaku* discourse unfolded through the process of textual exegesis, philological study, and grammatical explication, and the interrogation of issues of language and textuality was at the center of this practice. As a consequence, the conclusions of the *kokugaku* practitioners emerge through a complex network of annotated texts, not as straightforward expository prose. But the difficulty of this form should not obscure the issues that concerned them: What is “Japan”? How did it emerge and how is it maintained? What binds those within it together?

It is through the articulation and exploration of these questions that “Japan” began to be constituted as the primary mode of community, one that transcended and subsumed other sources of identity, such as status, occupation, religion, region, village, and city. To this point in Tokugawa Japan, philosophical discussions of community had, for the most part, been framed by Confucian theory, which explained human society as a network of interlocking hierarchical social relationships — ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, teacher and student, and so on — that ideally were to be infused with benevolence from the superior and respect, even rever-

ence, from the inferior. When individuals in these various social roles acted in conformance with the ethical requirements of their position, community took form. In Confucian analysis, “Japan” had no clearly defined status beyond a set of geographical borders: it was nothing more than a set of superficial “local” variations of universal and transcendent norms, although these norms were considered by many to be best exemplified in China. Norinaga and other kokugaku scholars began to question this understanding of the community by making “Japan” the locus of their discussions.

My use of the term “community” here and throughout this work is informed by the work of scholars such as Cornelius Castoriadis and Etienne Balibar. Castoriadis has argued that community takes form as the product of a regime of representation. He uses the term “social imaginary” to describe the domain of significations, the array of signifieds, practices, and symbols, the production of which allows a society to represent itself as a community of shared interests, beliefs, and ideals.² Similarly, Balibar has stated that community “is based on the projection of individual existence into a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name, and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past (even when they have been fabricated and inculcated in the recent past).”³ Following Castoriadis and Balibar, I conceive of community as something that is “imagined” and thereby constituted through multiple acts of signification, representation, and narration. The goal of this study is to explore this process of production in relation to a distinct historical moment. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, kokugaku discourse was not an exercise in antiquarianism, nor an expression of nostalgia, as some accounts have suggested. Rather, it was a moment of social formation in which one set of representations, one “imaginary,” was beginning to fail and another was taking form.

The context of this transformation is the subject of the first two chapters, in which I explore the social, political, and intellectual context that gave rise to kokugaku discourse. Chapter 1 examines the “crisis of community” that began in the second half of the eighteenth century, as economic transformation, famine, and unrest made the politically authorized social divisions of samurai, merchant, artisan, and cultivator and the geographic divisions of domain, city, and village increasingly difficult to maintain. As popular unrest in the form of urban riots and rural uprisings increased, the response of the bakufu (the government of the Tokugawa shogun) and the domainal governments of his chief retainers was to attempt to shore up the boundaries

upon which their authority depended. But both the dissolution of status and geographic constraints and the popular questioning of political claims to be governing ethically proved difficult to curtail.

Implicated in this moment of material and ideological crisis were the intellectual transformations that occurred in the eighteenth century. Chapter 2 explores this issue by examining how and why the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), the two texts that record the “Divine Age narrative” of Japan’s mythic beginnings, were read in the Tokugawa period. In the early Tokugawa period, whether viewed as a metaphysical treatise or as a history, the Divine Age narrative was taken up in ways that affirmed the conceptions of social and political order that emanated from the political authorities, the shogun and his vassals, the daimyo. However, in the eighteenth century, a new awareness of history and a concern for language began to call into question such interpretations of the narrative. As a result, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* began to be regarded as works that offered a glimpse into a time and place very different from the Tokugawa world.

In his work *The Order of Books*, Roger Chartier explores the cultural impact of the circulation of books in early modern Europe. He argues that the rise of print literature led to the formation of new “communities of readers” and that these communities came to “transform forms of sociability, permit new modes of thought, and change people’s relationship with power.”⁴ Chartier’s notion of the “community of readers” is a useful one for understanding the nature of kokugaku as a social practice. The *Kojikiden* established the *Kojiki*, in particular, but the other early Japanese texts as well, as important new objects of analysis. As a result, kokugaku practice came to be centered around the act of reading and analyzing the ancient texts and the related processes of producing, circulating, and acquiring commentaries on them. Today, the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, the poetic anthology called the *Man’yōshū* (*The Ten Thousand Leaves*) and the other texts that preoccupied the kokugaku scholars are canonical works. They are the “classics” of Japanese literature and thus are available in authoritative standard texts by noted scholars. But in Tokugawa Japan, these texts were still of shifting and indeterminate value. Even the question of how to pronounce the Chinese characters that comprised them gave rise to prolonged and heated debate.

In chapters 3 through 6, I examine how the *Kojiki* and other early Japanese works were read by four very different kokugaku scholars. My point of departure is of course Norinaga’s *Kojikiden*, the seminal work that was a consistent point of reference for all practitioners of kokugaku in the Tokugawa

period. From there I turn to explore a series of texts written in the wake of and in explicit response to the *Kojikiden* by Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), Fujitani Mitsue (1767–1823), and Tachibana Moribe (1781–1849). Like Norinaga, these authors took as their object the *Kojiki* and the other ancient texts and through their exegesis sought to explain “Japan” by interrogating the nature of political authority in relation to the world of the Divine Age narrative and by describing what cultural identity as “Japanese” meant for the individual subject. Some scholars have characterized the kokugaku of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as either politically unengaged or as consistent with the Tokugawa social and political order, but I argue that in this period kokugaku scholars were profoundly implicated in questioning the distribution of power within their society.⁵

For those familiar with the modern Japanese literature on kokugaku, the decision to focus on works by Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe will undoubtedly seem an odd one. In the major works on kokugaku produced in modern Japan, these authors do not figure greatly, if at all. Overwhelmingly, studies have focused on the work of what were termed the “great men” of kokugaku. Adopting a narrative of “development” or “evolution,” the modern histories of kokugaku describe how in the mid-Tokugawa period Keichū (1640–1701) and Kada no Azumamaro (1669–1739) began to study the early Japanese texts in the midst of an intellectual world dominated by Confucianism.⁶ However, it was not until the *Man'yōshū* studies of Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769) that Confucian paradigms of interpretation, in which history and literature were evaluated in light of their ethical value, were set aside. Then, in his work on the *Kojiki*, it is said, Norinaga finally succeeded in resurrecting the pre-Confucian worldview of the ancient Japanese, which was then popularized and politicized by his self-proclaimed student, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), in the 1830s and 1840s.

As this genealogy suggests, there is an important and ongoing national narrative in which kokugaku is valorized as the intellectual movement that marked the emergence of Japanese national consciousness in the late eighteenth century. As a consequence, the early modern discourse has come to be profoundly implicated in the modern Japanese discourses on the nation and nationness. This understanding of kokugaku began to take form in the late nineteenth century in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the political revolution that overthrew the Tokugawa shogun, returned the emperor to power, and marked the beginning of Japan’s transformation to a modern nation-state. For figures such as Haga Yaichi (1867–1927) and Mu-

raoka Tsunetsugu (1884–1946), scholars who began to define the content and method of the modern academic disciplines of national literature and intellectual history in the late Meiji period, Norinaga's work marked the point of beginning for the modern humanistic study of the nation, a study in which they themselves were also involved as professors in Japan's new universities. They praised the "objectivity" and rigor of his analysis and embraced the objects of inquiry that he defined. The result was the acceptance of the problematic notion that an original and authentic Japan was recoverable as a set of unique and enduring cultural values, including reverence toward the imperial house based upon its claim of divine descent and a "national character" that was different from and superior to that of any other people. In the 1930s and during the war years, the privileging of kokugaku reached new heights in the hands of Yasuda Yojūrō and the other members of the Japan romantic school, who engaged in a "revolt against the West" by celebrating the uniqueness of Japanese culture, which Norinaga was said to have rediscovered and preserved.⁷

In the aftermath of World War II, the centrality of kokugaku in intellectual discourse on national identity continued, but now some scholars identified it as the source of Japan's descent into militarism, war, and defeat. The most influential of these critiques was Maruyama Masao's *Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* (Research on Japan's Political Thought, 1952).⁸ In this work, Maruyama traces the intellectual character of the modern emperor system back to eighteenth-century kokugaku and argues that the antirational impulses he perceives as ordering this discourse prevented a truly critical intellectual ethos from developing in Japan. This failure, Maruyama asserts, ultimately contributed to Japan's descent into fascism. A similar argument is made in Saigō Nobutsuna's *Kokugaku hihan* (A Critique of Kokugaku, 1948). Saigō argues that the method of Norinaga's *Kojikiden* was characterized by a set of philological, historical, and ethnological fallacies that produced and sustained a "passive," "antiprogressive," and "conservative" political subject.⁹ In the same vein, Matsumoto Sannosuke has stated that "kokugaku thought was an important source for the imperial ideology of the nation. I think that the notion of politics in kokugaku and the logic which supported it is the model for the politics and logic of national ideology after the Meiji period."¹⁰

Writing in the 1970s, however, Haga Noboru, the pioneering social historian of kokugaku, criticized the perspectives of Maruyama and Saigō. According to Haga, only by "making the study of kokugaku independent from 'politics'" — that is, from the political uses to which it was put in the pre-

World War II period—and placing it back within “popular history” (*minshūshi*), does the true meaning of the discourse become apparent. Haga states, “In fact, kokugaku was not only a movement that occurred in Japan. It took form within the context of the ethnic movements for independence and the movements against colonization in East Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century.”¹¹ As this statement suggests, Haga’s interest is in the kokugaku of the so-called Bakumatsu period, the final decades of Tokugawa rule that followed the forced “opening” of the country in 1854. In contrast to the “unpolitical” kokugaku of Norinaga, Haga characterizes Bakumatsu kokugaku as “political” but in terms very different from Maruyama and Saigō: it was not “narrow” and exclusionary” but rather a “modern” and “humanistic” popular movement for ethnic self-determination.¹²

What unites both prewar and postwar scholarship on kokugaku then is the assumption of continuity and therefore explanatory power vis-à-vis modern Japanese national identity. Of course, the assessment of the ethicality of this nationalism has changed dramatically, from natural and beneficial before the war, to abnormal and virulent in its aftermath, and then in Haga’s work, to modern and enlightened once again. My decision to approach kokugaku by abandoning the genealogy of “great men” and the narrative of development it instantiated is tied to the second purpose of this work. In addition to exploring the political meaning of kokugaku in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, I also reconsider the relation between the kokugaku discourse on “Japan as community” and the modern Japanese sense of nationness.

The origin of national identities is of course an issue that has long been pursued by historians, sociologists, and political scientists. In 1882 Ernest Renan delivered a talk before the Sorbonne, “What Is a Nation?” that still reverberates through contemporary discourse on the nation and nationalism. In it, Renan moved methodically through the various deterministic explanations of the formation of national communities then current in late nineteenth-century Europe. Race, language, dynastic principles, religious affinities, economic interests, and geographical boundaries are taken up, but each is dismissed in turn by means of reference to specific nations, the histories of which call into question any attempt to identify a general principle of nation formation. Renan concluded that “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. . . . [It is] a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.”¹³ In recent years, authors such as Eric Hobsbawm,

Benedict Anderson, and Homi Bhabha have focused on the “constituted” nature of the nation, by analyzing the processes by which the nation as a form of community and a mode of individual identity is produced and inculcated as real by means of specific political, social, and cultural practices in the context of the modern nation-state.¹⁴ Thus Anderson explores the role of the print media in producing what he calls the “imagined community” of the nation, Hobsbawm examines the use of “invented traditions” to create a sense of a shared past and common culture, and Bhabha writes of the power of narrative to create a sense of nationness.

The notion that Japanese national identity was constituted in the modern period and then that moment of production was forgotten, hidden, or silenced, has oriented much recent work on Meiji Japan. In her study of Meiji ideology, Carol Gluck analyzes the role that nongovernmental figures, the civil (*minkan*) ideologues as she terms them, played in the production and diffusion of national identity in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ More recently, Takashi Fujitani has focused on the immediate post-1868 period and explored the role that state rituals, ceremonies, national holidays, and public buildings played in creating and inculcating mass nationalism. While Fujitani suggests that there may be early modern antecedents to the modern nation, citing in particular Harry Harootunian’s work on *kokugaku*, he describes this phenomenon as an “inchoate and scattered sense of identity” that was transformed or “channeled” by the Meiji leadership into a modern nationalism.¹⁶ My work departs from that of Fujitani and follows that of Harootunian in that it is precisely the discourse on Japanese identity that predates modern nationalism that I seek to interrogate. Prasenjit Duara has criticized the many recent studies of nationalism that deploy the terms “invented” and “imagined” to describe the nation in order to suggest that modern national consciousness necessarily represents a “radical discontinuity” with the past.¹⁷ Duara describes such works as “ahistorical” and argues instead that there are complex and multiple relations between premodern representations of community and the modern nation precisely because “modern nationalism seeks to appropriate these pre-existing representations into the mode of being of the modern nation.”¹⁸ In his study of the formation of the modern Greek nation, Stathis Gourgouris makes a similar point when he states that “the nation goes so far as to borrow from [the] *archegonous* ‘prehistorical’ narrative precisely those elements that . . . make possible the notion of ‘the national community,’ the political hypostasis of modern nation and state.”¹⁹

One scholar who has articulated the importance of prenatal aspects of community for the formation of the nation is Etienne Balibar. The study of these elements, he suggests, would allow for the writing of the “prehistory” of the nation. Balibar succinctly delineates the difference between such a “prehistory” and the writing of the linear history of the nation:

First, it consists of a multiplicity of qualitatively distinct events spread out over time, none of which implies any subsequent event. Second, these events do not of their nature belong to the history of *one* determinate nation. They have occurred within the framework of political units other than those which seem to us today endowed with an original ethical personality. . . . And they do not even belong to the history of the nation-state, but to other rival forms (for example, the “imperial” form). It is not a line of necessary evolution but a series of conjunctural relations which has inscribed them after the event into the prehistory of the nation form.²⁰

It is as a “prehistory” of the nation form, in the sense that Balibar uses that term, that I view the kokugaku discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The “Japan” of which the kokugaku scholars spoke and the forms of community they envisioned do not evolve into, or produce, or explain modern Japanese “nationness.” It is precisely to foreground the lack of linearity that I use the term “Japan as community” to describe the object of Tokugawa kokugaku practice, even at the risk of some awkwardness. Beginning in the 1880s, modern scholars would insist that the “Japan” of which Norinaga spoke was the nation-state Japan had become, and thus they termed kokugaku a discourse on Japan as nation, but I want to maintain a sense of distance and unfamiliarity. On the other hand, I do not mean to deny that there is a relationship between this discourse and that on the nation that emerged in the 1880s. As we shall see, the kokugaku discourse of the Tokugawa period provided a new vocabulary and a new set of epistemological strategies that were used to “think the nation” in the Meiji period.²¹

The project of writing the prehistory of Japanese nationness requires the disruption of the genealogy of “four great men” that has ordered so much of modern scholarship on kokugaku and which made possible the production of the narrative of development that is at its center. It was with this aim that I chose to juxtapose Norinaga’s *Kojikiden* with the work of what are generally regarded as minor or marginal figures. Ueda Akinari, Fujitani Mitsue, and Tachibana Moribe are kokugaku scholars who appear for the most part

as footnotes and asides in the major modern studies, but their status in the modern histories is at odds with their stature in their own time. Akinari, best known today as the writer of the collection of supernatural tales *Ugetsu monogatari* (*Tales of Moonlight and Rain*), was the student of one of Kamo no Mabuchi's favored disciples. In addition to writing studies of the *Kojiki*, *Man'yōshū*, and other texts, he engaged Norinaga in a widely discussed and publicized debate over how to interpret the Divine Age chapters of the *Kojiki*. Fujitani Mitsue was a well-known figure in Kyoto intellectual circles. His work of *Kojiki* exegesis, *Kojiki tomoshibi* (*Illuminating the Kojiki*), called into question every premise of Norinaga's textual practice. Tachibana Moribe too produced a series of exegetical texts that challenged Norinaga's conception of the *Kojiki* and the understanding of the Divine Age he produced from its reading. A prominent figure in and around Edo, in the 1840s his fame rivaled that of his now better known contemporary, Hirata Atsutane.

Akinari and the others lectured to students and wrote texts that were widely read and discussed. Like Norinaga, they declared themselves to be practitioners of *kokugaku*, even as they subjected Norinaga's work to a series of penetrating critiques. However, the designation in the modern period of Norinaga's work as the "mainstream" of *kokugaku* required that this other body of texts be dismissed as flawed, marginal, and hence without significance.²² The rationale employed to effect this effacement took the form of a comparison between these textual traditions and that which was posited as "true" *kokugaku*. This comparison allowed these works to be characterized as tainted by extraneous influences or flawed in either their method or their results. Modern commentators have accordingly described Akinari's work as ordered by the rationalism of the Confucian tradition and thus at odds with the ethos of belief said to characterize *kokugaku*. Mitsue's work has been characterized as subject to any number of aberrant influences, including Taoism, Yoshida Shinto, Jōdo Buddhism, and medieval poetics. Tachibana Moribe, some have said, was a poor scholar whose philology was no match for that of Norinaga and whose theories derived from those of Hirata Atsutane.

Such characterizations are problematic on both theoretical and factual grounds. The arguments regarding influence are flawed not only in their attempt to posit some "pure" *kokugaku* that is free from deviance but also because even the most careful accounting of sources does not become an explanation or an analysis. Even more troubling is the relation of centrality and margin that such characterizations sustain. It was only the judgment of

what kokugaku meant in the modern period that allowed historians to decide which works were significant and which were not. But this initial act of interpretation, which authorized the acts of selection that followed, has not been sufficiently interrogated. The modern understanding of kokugaku took form in the Meiji period, the time during which, as Gluck and Fujitani have noted, Japanese nationness was being produced and popularized both within and outside of government. It is at this moment that Norinaga's work came to be rendered canonical. Thus the genealogy of great men that took form is a cultural artifact that reveals much about Meiji notions of Japan as nation and far less about late Tokugawa concepts of Japan as community.

I am not the first to question the usefulness of the genealogy of great men for understanding the place of kokugaku in Tokugawa society. It has been critiqued before, most notably by Uchino Gorō, writing in 1970s.²³ Like Haga Noboru, Uchino wanted to "rescue" kokugaku from its associations with wartime ultranationalism. To this end, his work focuses on the so-called Edo school, kokugaku scholars associated with Kamo no Mabuchi, who took up poetry and poetics rather than the analysis of the Divine Age narrative. He made these scholars the point of origin for what he called *bungeishi* (the history of art and literature). In other words, against the politicized genealogy of the "four great men," he attempted to find another kokugaku that was purely literary and thus untainted by ideology. What is problematic of course is the easy opposition of the literary and the political. My analysis of the work of Norinaga, Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe suggests that this opposition cannot be maintained, because discussion of poetry, poetics, and fiction was implicated in interrogating the Tokugawa political order. A more productive critique of the genealogy of great men is Harry Harootunian's *Things Seen and Unseen*.²⁴ While Harootunian comments on the work of Mabuchi and Norinaga, his focus is on that of Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) and its reinterpretation in the hands of his rural disciples in the mid-nineteenth century. Harootunian uses figures such as Suzuki Shigetane, Mutoke Yoshika, and Miyauchi Yoshinaga to explore how kokugaku became a discourse that rendered the agricultural village a divinely authorized mode of community.

While my debt to Harootunian's analysis is apparent throughout this work, I take a different approach. The scholars I examine are not members of the same "school," that is, disciples of the same teacher, nor does a single privileged site such as the "village" thematically link their work. Rather, they represent disparate forms of kokugaku that, unlike the work of Atsutane's disciples, were not directly implicated in the Bakumatsu movement to bring

down the Tokugawa bakufu. What allows me to bring them together is their interest in the Divine Age narrative and their determination to use the texts that inscribe it, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, to construct new visions of community. My strategy of “reading from the margins” is not, however, meant to minimize the impact of Norinaga’s work. Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe all wrote in response to the *Kojikiden*, and it is this work that defined the terms of the discussion of Japan, but this dialogic relation does not mean that their work is unimportant. Rather, it is these heterogeneous and discontinuous textual traditions that together provide a point of access into what *kokugaku* was in the late Tokugawa period.

This discourse on the nature of Japan was ordered around a number of common themes. No single issue concerned Norinaga and his critics more than the nature and significance of the language of the ancient texts. Their discussions of etymology, morphology, phonetics, and syntax may strike modern readers as tedious and antiquarian, but questions of language were profoundly implicated in their discussions of community. In a society, where every act of speech and writing was shaped by variables such as gender, genre, dialect, status, and so on, the ideal of an original, authentic, and enduring “Japanese” language was a powerful means to explain and thereby constitute cultural identity.

To early Tokugawa scholars, the *Kojiki* appeared to be a work in Chinese, albeit a peculiar and corrupt Chinese. Norinaga, however, argued that the network of Chinese characters that comprised the text was in fact a sophisticated method of inscription meant to preserve the orality and immediacy of the archaic language. The recovery of this language was for him the means to resurrect what it had meant to be “Japanese” in the archaic period. Thus in the *Kojikiden* he abandoned the standard system of diacritical markers and pronunciation glosses used by earlier annotators and rewrote the *Kojiki* in the phonetic script known as *kana* in a feat of linguistic bravado so skilled that the “Chineseness” of the text ceased to be an issue for many. Jean Luc-Nancy has argued in his discussion of community that “nothing is more common to the members of a community, in principle, than a myth, or a group of myths. Myth and community are defined by each other.”²⁵ In just such a way, it is this founding myth of an authentic Japanese language—so patently belied by the text of the *Kojiki* itself—that gave rise to and sustained much of the *kokugaku* discourse on Japan.

Issues of language reverberate through the work of Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe, each of whom grappled with the idealization of orality upon which

Norinaga relied. What they all questioned, albeit from different perspectives, was the notion that the *Kojiki* narrative was transmitted orally within Japanese society unaltered from the Divine Age until that moment in the eighth century when it was finally inscribed. For Akinari, the notion of a text that preserved orality could not be sustained, and he eventually abandoned the analysis of the Divine Age altogether. In contrast, Mitsue and Moribe embraced language as a mode of cultural identity, but not on Norinaga's terms. Rejecting Norinaga's claim that the oral transmissions needed no interpretation but revealed directly and immediately the reality of the archaic world, Mitsue asked who spoke, to whom, and why. He argued that the *Kojiki* was inscribed in poetic language by the emperor Jinmu, the first emperor of the "Age of Men," who employed a complex system of metaphors to explain how he was able to establish his rule and constitute Japan as a community. Moribe too found Norinaga's conception of orality untenable. He argued that at the moment when the *Kojiki* narrative was passed from the deities to men, it was transformed by the process of transmission as the people of ancient Japan altered and adapted it through the use of metaphor, allegory, and rhetorical embellishment.

For Norinaga, the issue of language was intimately tied to his assertion that in the ancient period the Japanese people had perceived and experienced the world very differently from their descendants in his own time. He argued that before contact with China, the Japanese people had lived "naturally" (*onozukura*) in union with the deities, the emperor, and one another, but with the introduction of Confucianism and Buddhism came ideas, norms, and values that were not "natural" but human in origin. When Norinaga spoke of "returning to the Divine Age," he referred to the recovery of the mode of subjectivity—the form of consciousness that made unquestioning belief in the deities possible and made political institutions unnecessary—that had been lost. Within *kokugaku* discourse after Norinaga, the consideration of what it meant to "be Japanese" became the discursive site where *kokugaku* scholars pursued the vertical relations of power that were so much a part of their world. Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe relentlessly pursued the nature of the relation between the "private" world of the individual subject and the "public" world constituted by political authority, but each questioned the regime of cultural difference that ordered Norinaga's account.

My exploration of the *kokugaku* discourse on Japan focuses on the period from 1780, when Norinaga's *Kojikiden* began to circulate, up until the 1840s, when Moribe was writing. But the debate over the nature of community did

not end then. In the 1850s and 1860s, the kokugaku movement came to be implicated in the growing social turmoil that followed the “opening” of Japan. As criticism of the Tokugawa bakufu grew, some kokugaku practitioners began to call for radical political change, the restoration of the emperor to the political role he had played in Japan a millennium before, a goal many initially believed was achieved in 1868. This kind of kokugaku was termed *fukko* or “restorationist” kokugaku.²⁶ In the first years of the Meiji period, figures associated with the restorationist kokugaku schools took up positions of influence in the new Office of Shinto Worship, as well as in other offices and bureaus of the new government. But even at this moment, a new vision of Japan as modern nation-state was taking form among Japan’s new leaders, many of whom soon grew impatient with the kokugaku practitioners’ attempts to define policy by reference to antiquity. As nation building began in earnest in the 1870s, kokugaku visions of Japan as community came to be mediated by new notions of nationness.

Partha Chatterjee has focused on the rise of nationalism within the colonial situation and argued that in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, discourse on nationness has a complexity that distinguishes it from European examples. He argues that for the non-West, nationalism is a “derivative discourse” that involved the implementation of social codes, cultural categories, and frameworks of thought that were other. Moreover, it was implicated in new relations of power at each moment and every level of this process — between the different cultures in question certainly, but also between the intellectuals who accept the new discourse and those who do not, between intellectuals and the mass of people. The consequence of this problematic process has been, in Chatterjee’s words, a series of suppressed possibilities and unresolved contradictions for the people of non-Western cultures who have been “seduced, apprehended, and imprisoned” by the specter of the nation.²⁷ Of course, Japan in the late nineteenth century had a very different political status than did India, the country that is Chatterjee’s point of reference. It was a sovereign nation-state, not a colony. Nonetheless, the cultural and political relations of power of which he speaks informed social and political discourse on Japan as nation in the Meiji period.

In chapter 7, I explore the status of kokugaku in this new context, focusing in particular on how historians of thought and literature came to recoup kokugaku as a discourse on the nation. Modern academicians such as Haga Yaichi and Muraoka Tsunetsugu were all too aware of the claims of cultural supremacy that emanated from Europe and America. They worked hard to

prove that Japan's indigenous "civilization" was as modern as anything the West had to offer. It was in this context that the genealogy of great men took form in order to demonstrate that kokugaku was both "national" and "scientific." Yet even as a reconstituted "new kokugaku" was transformed into an intellectual orthodoxy, other forms of intellectual practice emerged on the margins of mainstream academia. While relegated to the footnotes of the histories of the nation, the works of Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe continued to be read. In the hands of intellectuals such as Origuchi Shinobu (1887–1953) and Tsuda Sōkichi (1873–1961), who questioned the theories of Japanese culture emanating from the state in the 1910s and 1920s, this body of texts was used to suggest the possibility of "imagining" a different Japan.

E. J. Hobsbawm opens his influential work *Nations and Nationalism* since 1780 with a brief fable about aliens who arrive on earth in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust that destroyed all life on this planet. The visitors quickly come to the conclusion that the last two hundred years of human history and the cause of the cataclysmic war that ended it are inextricably tied to an institution called the "nation," but they are at a loss to grasp what this term means exactly and why it came to have such a hold on human emotions.²⁸ Hobsbawm's point is that the idea of the nation is inextricably bound up with the political, cultural, and social exigencies of modern experience, so much so that we have a difficult time thinking beyond the notion of the nation that has come to be embedded in the histories, cultures, and social norms of the countries in which we live. Thinking beyond the nation is something that still eludes me, but in this work I hope to catch a glimpse of a moment before the nation.

Chapter 1

Late Tokugawa Society and the Crisis of Community

Miroslav Hroch, the pioneer social historian of European nation-formation, has argued that “for national consciousness to arise, there must be something for it to become conscious of.”¹ His point is that historically the constitution of the nation as a new locus of identity has occurred in the context of a set of socioeconomic transformations that made it possible to begin to think beyond traditional conceptions of community. These transformations include a social or political crisis of the old order that brings rising discontent among many within a society and a loss of faith in traditional moral systems, new forms of social and geographic mobility resulting from the commercialization of agriculture and handicraft production in the countryside, and a high level of social communication made possible by expanding rates of literacy, the formation of schools, and the rise of market relations. Within this kind of social setting, as traditional ties weakened or dissolved, new collective identities began to take form.² Significantly, Hroch, while focusing on the social context that gives rise to nationalism, avoids the reductionism and determinism that have characterized some attempts to explain the rise of nationalism. The social changes he delineates are not presented as the “causes” of nationalism, but rather as a set of conditions that contributed to its conceptualization.

Hroch’s work focused on European society, but his discussion provides a framework for reconsidering the developments that shaped Japanese society in the late Tokugawa period as the *kokugaku* discourse on Japan emerged. This was a tumultuous era, marked by economic change, natural disasters, famine, and unrest, but also by new forms of cultural production, spurred by expanding literacy, a burgeoning publication industry, and the creation and diffusion of popular media. It was in this context, as older explanations of how society “worked” became increasingly difficult to maintain, that Norinaga, Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe began to rethink the political, social, and

geographic divisions that ordered their world. The prolonged debate over the nature of Japan in which they engaged is the focus of the chapters that follow, but in this chapter I want to discuss the social conditions that mediated their attempts to explore community.

THE READERS IN QUESTION

The background of the kokugaku scholars themselves provides a window into the complexity of late Tokugawa Japan. While the founders of the Tokugawa political order had envisioned a society in which social and geographic mobility would be limited and in which the *bushi* or samurai as scholar-officials would be at the center of cultural productions, the experiences of Norinaga, Akinari, Mitsue, and Moribe suggest how inadequate this conception had become. They are a heterogeneous group, and the course of their lives defies easy generalization by means of reference to either social or spatial boundaries.

Motoori Norinaga was born in 1730 in Matsuzaka, the second son of a wealthy cotton merchant, Ozu Sadatoshi.³ After his father's death in 1740, the family's finances suffered, but they were still affluent enough to provide Norinaga with a good education. He was schooled in Confucian texts like many merchant sons of his day and also received lessons in poetry composition, tea ceremony, and *nō* chanting. At the age of sixteen Norinaga was sent to an uncle's shop in Edo as an apprentice, but he returned home after only one year after apparently showing no talent for business. He was then adopted into the Imaida family, paper merchants in Yamada, a town not far from Matsuzaka. However, life with his adopted family apparently did not go smoothly, and he again returned home to Matsuzaka. When his elder brother died in 1751, Norinaga became the head of the family and at that point changed the family name from Ozu to Motoori, a reference to a samurai ancestor of the pre-1600 period. The following year he was sent to Kyoto by his mother to study medicine, with the hope that this would provide him with an occupation.

Norinaga studied in Kyoto for more than five years, and in this city, one of the cultural centers of his day, he quickly became involved in the primary forms of intellectual practice of his day. He studied with Hori Keizan, an eclectic Confucian scholar who was trained in Neo-Confucianism, but who also had a profound interest in the work of revisionist Confucianists such as Ogyū Sorai. At the same time, he actively pursued training in the composi-

tion of *waka* poetry and attended many poetry competitions. It was in Kyoto that Norinaga came into contact with the emerging discourse of *wagaku*, or “Japanese studies,” when he happened upon a work by Keichū, a Buddhist monk who wrote on the *Man’yōshū* and other early Japanese works. In 1757, Norinaga completed his medical studies and returned to Matsuzaka where he began to practice medicine, the occupation that would provide his main source of income for the rest of his life. About the same time he also began to read works by Kamo no Mabuchi, another scholar of *wagaku*, and to offer instruction in poetics and the *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) to acquaintances in Matsuzaka. In 1763 he was able to meet Kamo no Mabuchi for the first and only time and formally enrolled as his student. The following year he began his research on the *Kojiki*.

Ueda Akinari too was raised within a merchant household. Born in 1734 to a “pleasure woman” (*yūjo*) in the brothel district of Osaka, he was adopted and raised in a family of retail merchants who sold oil and paper.⁴ He was educated to some extent in the private Confucian academy, the *Kaitokudō*, which was located near his childhood home in the *Dōjima* section of Osaka, and also received training in *waka* and the linked verse form known as *haikai*. In 1755 he took over the management of the family business, but at the same time he was writing prose fiction; he eventually published two popular collections of stories in the mid-1760s. Akinari would later recall that it was around this time that he first became interested in the early Japanese texts when he, like Norinaga, stumbled upon a work by Keichū while in Kyoto, a city to which he often traveled to attend poetry gatherings. He soon began to search for a teacher and in 1766 became the student of Katō Umaki, a samurai and bakufu official who was a disciple and intimate of Kamo no Mabuchi. In 1771 Akinari’s home and business were destroyed in a fire, and he turned to the study of medicine. From 1776, he supported himself by practicing medicine, a profession he shared with Norinaga, all the while continuing to teach, edit, and write commentaries on the ancient Japanese texts.

Unlike Norinaga and Akinari, Fujitani Mitsue was of samurai status.⁵ At the age of nineteen, Mitsue’s father, Nariakira, was adopted into the Fujitani family, samurai who served the Tachibana family, the daimyo of Yanagawa (present-day Fukuoka prefecture). For the generous annual stipend of 200 *koku* of rice, Nariakira and later Mitsue maintained the Kyoto residence of the Tachibana, oversaw the delivery and storage of their tax rice in Osaka, and managed their financial transactions in that city. Nariakira’s

natural father, Minagawa Nariyoshi, was a dealer in antiques, but he had an interest in scholarship that he conveyed to his children. The Confucian scholar, Minagawa Kien, was Nariakira's elder brother, and Nariakira himself was well known for his scholarship. His most famous works are the *Kazashisho* and the *Ayuisho*, both of which attempted the morphological exploration of the Japanese language. Born in 1768 into this family that valued scholarship, Mitsue was schooled in the most important cultural forms of his age. When he was twelve he began to study the orthodox tradition of waka composition with an aristocrat of the Dōjō school, which emphasized rigid adherence to the poetic conventions of the imperial anthology, the *Kokinwakashū* (Collected Poems from Ancient and Modern Times, 905). He was, at the same time, being tutored in the Confucian classics by his uncle, and in his mid-teens he became the disciple of a noted haikai poet. Mitsue would later recall that it was as a youth of sixteen or seventeen (that is, c. 1784–1785) that he first attempted to read the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and sought out Norinaga's works as an aid to understanding them.

The early life of Tachibana Moribe, the final figure in this study, stands in sharp contrast to that of Norinaga, Akinari, and Mitsue. He was born in 1781 in a village called Obuke in Ise province, the eldest son of Iida Motochika, the village headman.⁶ However, while Moribe was still quite young, his father lost his position as headman and was exiled from the village, a punishment that seems to have been related to a peasant uprising that occurred in Ise during his tenure as headman. In the turbulent decade of the 1780s the Ise region was the site of rural violence, as crop failures following a destructive flood and increased demands from the local lord for corvée labor angered cultivators. Motochika, as headman, may have been held responsible when his fellow villagers participated in the rebellion. In the aftermath of his father's exile, the family fell into poverty. Moribe was passed from relative to relative, sometimes living in Edo, sometimes in Osaka. He seems to have received little formal education, until as a young man he began to educate himself by reading the Confucian classics and works on Chinese and Japanese history. Eventually he was able to support himself by teaching reading and writing to children in his neighborhood. Then, when he was in his late twenties, Moribe began to study the early Japanese texts with Shimizu Hamaomi, a scholar associated with the Mabuchi school.

As these biographical sketches reveal, the *kokugaku* scholars whose work I explore were the products of very different circumstances. While Mitsue