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# Tangled Subjectivities: An Examination of the Japanese Subject from 1868-1912

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Tangled Subjectivities: An Examination of the Japanese Subject from 1868-1912

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When a 260-year-old regime comes toppling down, how do you organize society after the fall? That is the challenge that faced members of the Meiji state after the end of the Tokugawa Bakufu. The need for internal unity and the pressure of Western Imperialism, as imposed by the Unequal Treaties,<sup>1</sup> raised the stakes of the Meiji State's goal: to create a modern nation-state with a unifying national identity. What did that process entail? First, create a legal precedent for control and monopolize violence. Second, define the individual because a nation needs a public, and a public cannot exist without people. Third, negotiate the relationship between the freedom of the individual and the power of the State in the connective process of state-building. Frictions between individual and state, single or multiple, and truth or the absence of it emerged. This thesis argues that fighting over those tensions became the defining act of modernity and the foundation of Meiji Japan.

This project analyzes the ways individuals relate to their community because it is often taken for granted that this is a naturally occurring process. This thesis aims to answer the question of how underlying contradictions contributed to the formation of a modern nation-state. Additionally, some scholars previously suggested that there are good or bad ways to modernize a nation, and used Japan and Germany as examples of "bad" given their fall into Fascism. Historian Erik Grimmer-Solem summarized the trend of historiography to use Germany and

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<sup>1</sup> Before the rise of the Meiji state, Commodore Perry of the United States negotiated the first of the Unequal Treaties with Japan in 1854, several European nations following soon after. Historian Michael R. Auslin summarized the treaties as, "...contained provisions for extraterritoriality, denied the Japanese the freedom to set their own tariff rates, and they included most-favored nation (MFN) status for the Western signatories but not the Japanese." The Unequal Treaties put Japan at a distinct economic disadvantage in increasingly global trade relations. Such an economic disadvantage posed the risk of further vulnerability to Western Imperialism, and the potential for destabilization within Japan. If the Meiji state hoped to protect Japan from further encroachment of Western nation-states it would need to achieve a level of modernization that Western-nation states would be forced to recognize as a worthy of renegotiating treaties on more equal terms.

Please see Michael R. Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2-71

Japan as examples of modernization that broke from the liberal-democratic path, “A number of these German influences would justify authoritarian, statist, semi-feudal, and nativist tendencies in Meiji Japan, thereby reinforcing Japanese peculiarity and deviance from liberal-democratic patterns of development.”<sup>2</sup> This project resists the tendency to split the making of a modern nation-state into oversimplified categories of “good” or “bad.” This thesis does not read from World War II backward, or accept Japan’s progress through the Meiji period and beyond as an inevitability. Those previous methods rob the history of the dynamic intersections and dialogues that shaped the way people experienced their relationship to “nation.” Instead, this project addresses the dialogues surrounding how the concepts of authority, individualism, and nation functioned in Meiji era Japan. To accomplish this, I tracked the relationships between different people, ideas, and the authority of the community through politics, intellectual debate, and literature. I combined these elements to demonstrate that not only are each of these areas connected, they were always a part of each other. None of them could have occurred the way they did without the influence of the others because they existed within the same space and thought. To make that clear, I will peel back the layers of creating a national identity.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Meiji State, the Tokugawa Bakufu controlled Japan for around 260 years. The Tokugawa Bakufu was a military government, based on the hereditary samurai class, led by the Shogun. The Tokugawa Bakufu maintained a closed country policy severely restricting contact with outside nations. It worked off the Bakuhan system where feudal lords resided over semi-autonomous domains called hans. In this system, the identity of the public defined the

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<sup>2</sup> Erik Grimmer-Solem, "German Social Science, Meiji Conservatism, and the Peculiarities of Japanese History." *Journal of World History* 16, no. 2 (2005): 189.

<sup>3</sup> This project breaks with a vein of historiography that emerged in the 1970s, tying Germany and Japan together to explain how the breaking from a standard path of modernization rooted in liberal-democratic tendencies led to fascist regimes. This project weaves together themes and ideas addressed in works such as *Japan's Modern Myths* by Carol Gluck, *Dawn to the West* by Donald Keene, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* by Karatani Kōjin, and *Making a Moral Society* by Richard M. Reitan.

individual's subjectivity around one's relationship to their specific community (often han), and the relationship of that community to the Bakufu. After abolishing the Bakuhan system, the Meiji State sought to replace it with a new national identity by redefining systems of power, the public, and the agency of the individual within the nation. Part of that redefining process included gathering information from around the world. Integrating ideology from abroad promised a path to create the foundation of the nation-state that Meiji leaders desired, but that same importation chafed against the past that the Meiji state tried (and never completely succeeded) to separate itself from. State leaders had to wrestle the unifying control they desired away from the rubble of the Tokugawa Bakufu, and weave it into the very nature of the public that the nation required.

### **I. Writing a Public Fit for the Nation**

First, the Meiji state had to set the legal precedent for its authority to exercise that unifying power. The Charter Oath of 1868 was the first attempt to create that legal foundation. This document served as Meiji leaders' attempt to solidify power after troops from the Satsuma and Chōshū domains overtook the Imperial Palace and declared an "imperial restoration" in defeating the reign of the military government of the Tokugawa Bakufu.<sup>4</sup> The term "imperial restoration" claimed that the defeat of Tokugawa forces restored the emperor to his proper position as the heart of the state. The heart of the Meiji state still required a body though, a public body. To create that public, state leaders needed to incorporate the people into the new state, and encourage their involvement in its success. The Charter Oath states:

By this oath, we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

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<sup>4</sup> "Letter of Resignation of the Last Shogun." in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 670.

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.

*[Meiji boshin, pp. 81-81; McLaren, Japanese Government Documents, p.8]<sup>5</sup>*

While public involvement in the state appealed to shades of democracy, incorporating the public into the state structure provided a function other than representation. By outlining the role that the public should play in assemblies, administration, and pursuing a “calling,” the state effectively claimed the public as a part of the legal body of the state. In subsuming the public, the writers of the Charter Oath not only tried to consolidate their public, but also set the foundation for monopolizing violence by establishing the state as the centralizing authority of these assemblies and affairs. State leaders tried to sever the past systems of the Tokugawa Bakufu from the present by associating previous practices with “evil,” and not being based on the “just laws of nature.” State leaders did violence to public memory to attempt to separate the people from their prior identities and push them towards a new national identity. The Meiji state-makers

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<sup>5</sup> “The Charter Oath,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 672.

defamiliarized the structure of the Tokugawa Bakufu as something inherently negative; both the individuals and the state had to avoid those past policies for the good of the nation and the public.

The writers of the Charter Oath drew a clear line in the sand. That line outlined the public and helped distance Meiji leaders from their own ironic participation in the various cliques of the Tokugawa's Bakuhan system.<sup>6</sup> The Charter Oath worked to manufacture a safe distance from the recent past to reduce the strength of that history's influence on the present moment. The Meiji state promised a nation where people of all classes would enjoy equality and participation in government affairs. The Meiji state-leaders also encouraged the association of the new state with the "knowledge" that they intended to carefully curate from around the world for the betterment of Japan. Words like "just" and "nature" implied that the Meiji state replaced a system of unjust and unnatural practices. On the other side of the line, the Charter Oath alluded to the consequences of slipping back into the practices of Tokugawa Bakufu. The document offered no specific threat, but by contrasting all the positive benefits of the Meiji state with the "evil" of the past, state-leaders planted the seed of a threat. The Meiji state's community excluded those who engaged in those condemned practices. The Charter Oath's underlying threat of inclusion versus exclusion from the community of nation shored up the state's solidification of its right to monopolize violence. State-leaders branded that violence as an engine for the type of progress the nation needed to defend itself from Western Imperialism and the internal fracturing that contributed to the fall of the Tokugawa Bakufu.

Three years after the Charter Oath, the Meiji state made good on its promise to gather information from around the world to strengthen the nation. To kick start that project the Meiji

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<sup>6</sup> E.H. Norman, *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E. H. Norman*, edited by John W. Dower (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 162-4.

state sent many of its leaders, including Iwakura Tomomi, Okubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi, Itō Hirobumi, and Kume Kunitake, abroad to the United States and Europe on the Iwakura Mission in 1872-3. The mission had several goals. One, to gather information on state-building tactics, military structure, and educational institutions. Two, spread recognition of the Meiji State and the “restored” Meiji emperor. Three, renegotiate the economically unfair treaties imposed by the United States and several European nations.<sup>7</sup> The information acquired on this mission served as a foundation for the Meiji state’s policy-making, including educational and constitutional models. The mission provided another knife for the Meiji State to use to try to cut itself free from the past. First, state delegates needed to sharpen that blade using the various stops the mission made.

Germany was one of the key stops that Kume identified in his reports. Germany’s emergence as a player for major power unsettled many of its European neighbors but made it a promising source of information on industrializing quickly. The Iwakura Mission visited not only governmental institutions in Germany, but also a military museum, an armory, and factories.<sup>8</sup> The mission made similar stops in other nations. Studying military, legal procedures, and economic systems provided references for the processes that create the growth outlined in the Charter Oath. Namely, the growth Japan needed to gain the wealth and stability need to maintain itself against imperialism. The mission served another function: clarifying the position of individuals and community.

The treatment the members of the Iwakura mission received while in Germany served as an example of diplomacy that helped define how people relate to one another when they are a

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Nish ed, *The Iwakura Mission in America and Europe: A New Assessment*. (Abingdon: Japan Library, 1998): 2-4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 119.



part of different communities (nations). The delegates on the Iwakura Mission were not the only Japanese studying in Germany. Kume reported, "...that the Japanese students were able to appear at the railway station in large numbers, because the teachers had given them leave. And the teachers did so, because they revered their Emperor and wished to act in the same way as him, greeting the Japanese mission."<sup>9</sup> This gathering of school students showed a specific Japanese subjectivity coming to light, or at least the appearance of one. The students were not just any students that came to see the Iwakura Mission, they were Japanese students. The implication is that there was a sense of identification between students and the delegates the Iwakura Mission; that they were all Japanese people in Germany. The students meeting other Japanese while abroad reinforced their identification with a sense of "Japaneseness." They encountered men who were a part of the same community as them, which demonstrated how individuals learn how to relate to their community through others within it. Furthermore, the German people acted in reference to Emperor Wilhelm I in their treatment of the delegates of the Iwakura Mission. The German people identified the Japanese delegates as an "other" within Germany, thus contributing both to what it meant to be German and to what it meant to be Japanese. The Iwakura delegates brought home the political and legal ideologies they sought out, and a sharpened sense of national identity.

The findings of the Iwakura Mission and the Meiji States' current policy did not, however, provide an entirely satisfactory answer to the question of how to define the public's relation to the state. The Charter Oath provided a legal definition of that relationship, but intellectuals debated the principles underlying the legal construction. The people that made up the public had to be theoretically defined for the project started by the Charter Oath to work. The

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 115

Meiji Six Society, a group intellectuals interested in promoting Western learning, took on this debate in their 1874-5 journal the *Meirokezasshi*, or Meiji Six Journal. The Meiji Six Society wrote about a range of topics, but much of their work focused on concerns over the state of the Meiji Government. They debated different methods of bringing the people and the government into unity with each other. This unity was necessary to both progress and security, although what precisely those things looked like differed. Historian Carol Gluck writes, “Although the definitions both of the task and of the threat were vastly different depending on the group elaborating them, the collective call was to the people, who lacked, it was said, an adequately developed, ‘sense of nation.’”<sup>10</sup> The Meiji Six Society recognized the state’s desire to consolidate its power and stability by teaching the people to have a greater “sense of nation.” That “sense of nation,” could only be taught through interacting with the state’s community of “nation.” The Meiji Six Society disagreed on the nature of individuals as a part of the state.

For one, Meiji Six members expressed different views on the line between the people and the state. Fukuzawa Yukichi argued for the establishing the power of the people as a force standing “side by side” with the government.<sup>11</sup> Fukuzawa saw the people and the government as separate; two entities standing beside each other. Mori Arinori criticized Fukuzawa’s “side by side” argument stating that, “Should you ask who the people are, the term signifies persons who possess rights associated with obligations that involve responsibilities. Officials, aristocrats, and commoners, therefore, are all included in the people.”<sup>12</sup> While Fukuzawa drew a line between the government and those outside it, Mori did not. Mori claimed that every person on the land

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<sup>10</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Mori Arinori, “Criticism of the Essay on the Role of Scholars.” in *Meiroke Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, ed. Braisted, William Reynolds. Translated by Adachi Yasuchi and Kikuchi Yuji. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 23

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

registers of Japan had their obligations as a Japanese national regardless of their specific position within the country.<sup>13</sup> This difference in Fukuzawa and Mori's views showed the struggle of defining the relationship between the public and the state. Do the government and the people influence each other from different sides of a division? Does that influence instead come from within an overarching community of "Japan?" These questions remained beneath the debate over how to define the public. That definition impacted how influence and power flowed. Meiji Six scholars addressed how education and participation in government impacted unity and authority as a potential answer.

Two opposing viewpoints emerged from that debate: memorialists and gradualists. The memorialists advocated for public assembly as a means of bringing the people to enlightenment, while the gradualists argued the nature of the people had to be "enlightened" before they should have the power to fully participate in government.<sup>14</sup> These views stood on different sides of the thin line between the freedom of the individual and the authority of the state. The tension between how intellectuals defined this relationship questioned several factors: the direction power flows, the legitimacy of the ideologies the state based its authority on, and the agency of the public. For example, gradualist Katō Hiroyuki wrote, "Yet the state's power must ultimately be undermined if there is a great excess of 'liberalism.' A nation can never survive once the state power has been undermined."<sup>15</sup> Katō tended to favor Austro-German models of the relationship between state and people. Gradualists like Katō feared that too much freedom for individuals would weaken the state's power and render it ineffectual. If that were to happen, the community

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid..

<sup>14</sup> William Reynolds Braisted. "Introduction," in *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, ed. Braisted, William Reynolds. Translated by Adachi Yasuchi and Kikuchi Yuji. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976): xvii-xlvi

<sup>15</sup> Katō Hiroyuki, "In Response to Fukuzawa," in *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, ed. Braisted, William Reynolds. Translated by Adachi Yasuchi and Kikuchi Yuji. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 22.

of nation itself would crumble without the authority of the state to hold it together. To avoid this disintegration, the state had to educate the people to think of themselves as a part of Japan's public as their primary identity. The state had to install the specific rules and values of the relationship between individual and community, between public and nation. Without this education, the state ran a heightened risk of the people using their participation to undermine the very community they were a part of.

On the opposing side, memorialists maintained that the people had to learn through participation. From this view, the freedom of individuals strengthened the unity of the nation. Memorialist Tsuda Mamichi advocated for freedom of the press using language complimentary to the practices of Britain and America. He wrote, "Civilized peoples escape from the reins with which barbarian governments oppress men. The distinction between civilization and barbarian can only be viewed in terms of whether the people have or have not freedom of speech and conduct."<sup>16</sup> The words "civilization" and "barbarian" are highly politicized terms. They denote a hierarchy of power both within and outside of the society in question. A "barbarian" government oppresses its people while a "civilized" one allows for "freedom of speech and conduct." In the "barbarous" situation the state consumes the rights of the people down to nothingness while undermining its own legitimacy among other nations.

A "barbarous" nation could never stand on the same playing field as civilized nations according to the rationale behind Western Imperialism and the Unequal Treaties.<sup>17</sup> The relationship between "barbarian" versus "civilized" was one that granted the "civilized" the authority to exert power over the "barbarian." Taking this into consideration, Tsuda believed that

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<sup>16</sup> Mamichi Tsuda, "Criticism of the Essay on the Role of Scholars," in *Meirokei Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, ed. Braisted, William Reynolds. Translated by Adachi Yasuchi and Kikuchi Yuji. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 72-73.

<sup>17</sup> Please see footnote 1 on page 1 for more information on the Unequal Treaties.

the individual's rights to participation and expression cultivated the learning the people needed to have to uphold a modern nation-state. Opposite of Katō's stance, memorialists argued that *not* using participation as the method of education would undermine the legitimacy and stability of the state. Tsuda added that Americans and Englishmen are truly free because their freedom of speech and conduct prevents them from depriving others of these freedoms because they attach so much value to their own rights to said freedoms.<sup>18</sup> Memorialists like Tsuda took the position that if individuals have more agency within the community, they are more likely to want to uphold those rights for others, as well as the stability of the authority that grants and projects those freedoms.

What did this disagreement between intellectuals mean for the legal parameters and goals of the Charter Oath? Line four of the Charter Oath claimed that the Meiji State based policies on the "just laws of Nature." The reference to "laws of Nature" was the same type of language and reasoning that appeared in the Constitutions of many Western nation-states. There is something unnatural about this version of "nature" despite the implication that these "laws" are an organically occurring way to organize a nation-state. The disagreement among the Meiji Six scholars highlighted the contradiction embedded in this concept that so many nation-states laid claim to as a source of legitimizing authority. There is a contradiction in the true laws of nature because the "truth" those laws depend on is something that an external force must create in the people rather than something occurring in nature. The memorialists and gradualists of the Meiji Six Society provided different solutions to the question of how to define the public in relation to the state. However, both of their solutions involved *developing* the public in terms of national

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<sup>18</sup> Mamichi Tsuda, "Criticism of the Essay on the Role of Scholars," in *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, ed. Braisted, William Reynolds. Translated by Adachi Yasuchi and Kikuchi Yuji. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 72-73.

spirit, unity, and education. Is “nature” still natural if it is something that must be taught, rather than something intrinsic to the people? Furthermore, different versions of what various parts of the public considered “just” or “natural” boiled underneath Meiji state’s attempts to create a unified national identity. The state provided an initial language of “nation,” but in handing that language to the public, the people could take it and transform or reinterpret it.

## **II. Resistance and the Dialogue of Disagreement**

In 1877, the Meiji state experienced a challenge to its attempts to define the relation between individuals and the state. That challenge was the Satsuma Rebellion. While Meiji state-makers worked on how to progress away from the Tokugawa Bakufu, that progression threatened to leave certain groups behind. The fall of the Tokugawa Bakufu marked the end of the samurai class as the oligarchs of the nation. Those samurai did not disappear despite Meiji state leader attempting to break with the past. 20,000 former samurai led by Saigō Takamori revolted against the Meiji State. Saigō had previously assisted in the creation of the Meiji state, but fractures occurred when Saigō became estranged from the agendas of Meiji state leaders.<sup>19</sup> While Meiji state-leaders were abroad, Saigō advocated for an invasion of Korea to demonstrate Japan’s military strength and the value of the samurai class as protectors of Japan’s polity.<sup>20</sup>

State leaders opposed the plan to invade Korea, denying Saigō and his followers the opportunity to prove the place of the samurai class in Meiji Japan.<sup>21</sup> The former samurai fell into the gap between the ghost of the Tokugawa Bakufu, and the Meiji State’s attempts to shape the relationship of the people to “nation.” When there appears to be no place left for any given group, they meet the mortality of their specific way of life. That pressure builds until three

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<sup>19</sup> Charles L. Yates. "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence of Meiji Japan." *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 449

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

possible outcomes remain; assimilate to the new conditions, carve out a space to exist, or ultimately disappear. Saigō Takamori and his followers attempted option two. Attacking the Meiji state offered the opportunity to potentially destroy the forces that appeared to be choking the samurai class. The Meiji state's prescription of "laws of nature" felt unnatural to Saigō and his followers. Thus, they resisted the attempts of the state to dictate a version of Japan, and what it meant to be Japanese, that failed to represent how they related to their community. The Satsuma Rebellion sought to redefine that relationship or break it off trying.

The Satsuma Rebellion failed with Saigō and many of his followers dead by the end of it. The rebellion's failure succeeded in capturing a specific moment in defining the Meiji state's version of identity and nation. While the Meiji state counted it as a victory for the Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress over the backwardness of feudalism, others had a different view. With Saigō, a sense of possibility that had characterized Meiji politics seemed to die too.<sup>22</sup> Saigō embodied a collective of dissenting voices from high and low. Historian Mark J. Ravina wrote, "Saigō represented an alternative to a statist, bureaucratic, and centralizing vision of modern Japan. An implausible range of critics, from proponents of Rousseau's social contract to defenders of samurai tradition, identified with Saigō's rebellion and mourned his death as a triumph of autocracy."<sup>23</sup> It was ironic that the Meiji state claimed to value public assembly and discussion, yet sections of its public saw the steps state-makers took to create a sense of "nation" as the marks of autocracy. That tension turned Saigō Takamori's defeat into a symbol greater than the death of one man. His death became the triumph of the Meiji state and a serious blow to

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<sup>22</sup> Mark J. Ravina. "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, "Seppuku", and the Politics of Legend." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2010), 692.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

the chorus of dissenting voices.<sup>24</sup> The resistance of the Satsuma Rebellion demonstrated that state methods of encouraging a particular relationship between individuals and the community of nation ran the risk of alienating the very people the state needed to serve as its public.<sup>25</sup>

When a source of authority creates a model identity as a tool for maintaining sovereignty, it opens the door for attempts to break that mold. By outlining the roles of Japanese people in the Meiji state, the Meiji state gave the public a tangible target to wrestle with. For example, proponents of Rousseau's philosophy took Western ideology and turned it back on the Meiji state, while defenders of the samurai tradition leveled Japan's past as a weapon. The Satsuma Rebellion challenged the Meiji state's ability to hold onto the power it had consolidated after the end of the Tokugawa Bakufu. Specifically, a group of the individuals that state leaders tried to incorporate into their public, broke away from both the legal and theoretical definitions that worked to bind individuals and community.

The writers of the Charter Oath had tried to separate the people and national memory from the Tokugawa Bakufu by charging it with participating in "evil customs of the past." The consequences of community versus exclusion underlying that language were not enough to sway the participants of the Satsuma Rebellion. Conversely, the repeated attempts to push the people towards a new national identity backfired by driving a wedge between the state and those who still tied a large part of their identity to the remains of the Tokugawa Bakufu. That split in the

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<sup>24</sup> Saigō Takamori was said to have committed suicide despite medical reports suggesting otherwise. The legacy of his suicide remained largely unchallenged in the historiography of the period despite there being a lack of concrete evidence. Other stories included that Saigo potentially ascended to Mars or escaped to Russia. The fantastical nature of these legacies marked not the precise truth of Saigo's death, but the significance of it in regards to the death of the samurai class, and the significance of that death to the future of Japan. Please see Mark J. Ravina's "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, "Seppuku", and the Politics of Legend" in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3.

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that grievances against the Meiji State came from a variety of groups. For example, disaffected samurai groups, commoners who were unhappy with the new land tax and levies design, and those pushing for a more representative government. Please see Mark J. Ravina. "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, "Seppuku", and the Politics of Legend." 711-3.



relationship between individual and state demonstrated another contradiction embedded in the making of a modern nation-state. The state needed to create a public for the nation but the same processes intended to create a collectivity in that public ran the risk of breeding disunity. That disunity then called on another step in the state-building process: the monopolization of violence.

The Meiji State's imperial army suppressed the Satsuma Rebellion with violence after a five-month struggle.<sup>26</sup> This type of armed violence was an extension of the rhetorical violence alluded to in political policies. Rebellion provided a tangible example of why state leaders staked a claim in ensuring that the agency of individuals only went so far. The imperial army defeated the alternative versions of national identity that Saigō and his men represented, and by extension, the Meiji state furthered its control over both violence and identity. The imperial army overtook the violence of the Satsuma Rebellion, thus forwarding the ideology that the state was the key negotiator in regards to national identity. The public did not have the right to exert that same pressure. By successfully putting down the Satsuma Rebellion, the Meiji state once again showed its commitment to separating the people from their former or alternative versions of national identity, even if gaining that control over Japanese subjectivity required the deaths of those seen as disrupting the goal of unity. With the Charter Oath's intentions and resistance to the Meiji state both on the table, state leaders needed to create another bridge between the community of nation and the individuals within it.

Twelve years after the Satsuma Rebellion, the Meiji State promulgated its Constitution in 1889. A constitution serves as a contract between the nation and its people. Additionally, writing a constitution was one of the processes Meiji State leaders had considered while traveling abroad. State leaders intended for the Constitution to tie together ideologies from abroad with the

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<sup>26</sup> Mark J. Ravina. "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, "Seppuku", and the Politics of Legend." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2010): 691.

specific needs of Japan to address the tensions that still needed ironing out. One cannot overlook that writing a constitution is inherently about control. It depends on the success of legally defining a public in a manner that causes that public to self-identify with the state-prescribed identity. Statesman Itō Hirobumi served as the central figure in developing the constitution.<sup>27</sup> He claimed, “I, for one, am convinced that now is the time to make unprecedented reforms and that conditions are already ripe for them... In politics it is best to adopt methods that fit changing circumstance.”<sup>28</sup> The Meiji state had already issued the Charter Oath in 1868 which defined the goals and values of the state. Then the state experienced resistance to its ideals during the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877. By 1889, state leaders needed to double down on their goal of weaving the public and their idea of “nation” together.

The writing process highlighted the same conflict that appeared in the Meiji Six Journals. All writers agreed that the imperial institution should remain intact and that an assembly was necessary. Gradualists favored a more limited legislature (similar to Germany), with the main focus on a system for developing Japan’s “national essence.”<sup>29</sup> After experiencing resistance, state leaders raised the stakes on what it meant to be a citizen of Japan. Historian Carol Gluck referenced *Taiyo* 3, no. 20 arguing, “that ‘just being born and raised in this country is not enough for the masses to be considered citizens (*kokumin*). The prerequisite for citizenship is a sound sense of nation (*kokkateki kannen*),’ without which the people remain ‘unpatriots’ (*hikokumin*), and the nation endangered.”<sup>30</sup> Different sides of the Constitutional debate fought over what type

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<sup>27</sup> “Itō Hirobumi.” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 728.

<sup>28</sup> Itō Hirobumi, “Memorial on the Constitutional Government, December 1880,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 728.

<sup>29</sup> “Defining the Constitutional State, 1876-1883,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 727.

<sup>30</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985): 25.

of governmental structure would work best to instill that national essence in the people. The popular rights side (in line with the Meiji Six's memorialists) wanted to introduce a British-style democracy with a two-chambered assembly and cabinet.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the debate that went into deciding on the details of the Constitution meant that a vital piece of creating a modern nation-state came from the act of arguing over what precisely constituted the national essence the Meiji state wanted. The debates of the Meiji Six Society and writers of the Constitution, combined with dissenting voices of the Satsuma Rebellion, demonstrated the vastness of the experiences that existed behind the veil of a single unified public. The Constitution of 1889 served as one document intended to bridge (and control) the multiplicity of identities that grated against attempts to create one definition of the relationship between the public and their national community.

The very first lines of the Constitution of 1889 laid out the legitimacy of state authority, and the intention to influence and develop the people for the collective benefit of the nation. The preamble states, "Having by virtue of the glories of Our Ancestors, ascended the Throne of a lineal succession unbroken for ages eternal; desiring to promote the welfare of, and to give development to the moral and intellectual faculties of Our beloved subjects.... and hoping to maintain the prosperity of the State, in concert with Our people and with their support."<sup>32</sup> Similar to the Charter Oath, writers emphasized unity between the public and the state. This pattern was not specific to just Japan. For example, the Constitution of the German Empire 1871 stated: "For the whole of Germany one common nationality exists with the effect that every

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<sup>31</sup>"Defining the Constitutional State, 1876-1883," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 727.

<sup>32</sup>"The Constitution of the Empire of Japan," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 745.

person (subject, State citizen) belonging to any one of the federated States...”<sup>33</sup> Given the Iwakura Mission’s visit to Germany (and other Western nations) the Meiji Constitution writers’ use of a similar type of collective language showed a pattern. The Iwakura Mission member’s goal of collecting information on state-building tactics highlighted that Japan was not the only nation that needed to walk the line between a modern nation-state’s monopoly on violence and the rights of individuals. One of the most tried methods for convincing individuals to identify with the needs and desires of their community is to appeal to the benefits of being a part of “us” instead of “them.”

Furthermore, the Meiji Constitution stated the state’s goal of developing the moral and intellectual faculties of the subjects to achieve that unity. The writers’ appeal to a collective effort towards the benefit of the state not only asked for unity, but it implied the consequences of standing out of that unity. If one was not a part of the community that worked towards the betterment of the nation, then they were an obstacle to that goal. Such obstacles, namely alternative versions of national identity, posed a risk to the collectivist mentality that the Meiji state wished to install as a vital part of belonging to the nation. The Satsuma Rebellion twelve years prior provided a still memorable example of what happens when a group of subjects becomes too forceful with an alternative version of what it meant to be a Japanese subject. The connection between the Meiji state’s goals, dissenting voices, and the desire to bridge that gap, grappled with contradictions embedded in the process of state-making. While those contradictions also appear in intellectual debate and literature, they come up even within the Meiji State’s policy.

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<sup>33</sup> “Constitution of the German Empire (April 16, 1871),” in *Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890*, ed. James Retallack, volume 4, *German History in Documents and Images* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute), 2. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=2776](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2776)

A key contradiction was the balancing act between the state's authority and its role in guaranteeing individual freedoms. The Constitution stated that, within the limit of the law, Japanese subjects have the rights to freedom of speech and writing, association, publication, and public meetings.<sup>34</sup> The inclusion of "within the limit of the law" gave State leaders an out if the liberties given to the public became too unruly. Yet at the same time, the promise of those freedoms served to reinforce the goal of unity. It allowed subjects to feel as though the community helped project their voices. State leaders offered subjects the choice to use writing, speech, debate, etc. to navigate how they related to other individuals and the community of nation. The state's power, as codified in the Constitution, hinged on its control of violence. Simultaneously, however, the state rooted its legitimacy in these new claims about the condition and freedoms of the individual. There is a paradoxical relationship between desiring a united identity and opening an avenue for a plurality of different dialogues about that relation. The individual had to have the ability to freely navigate his/her relation to the community, but the state leaders could not allow the discussion surrounding that navigation to splinter the ideals the Meiji state set out.

### **III. Education and the Relationship between Knowledge and Morals**

One way that Meiji state leaders attempted balance that tension was precisely as the preamble of the Constitution stated: developing the moral and intellectual faculties of the public. A vital method to drive that development was education.<sup>35</sup> Education created a means of disseminating the state's code of civil morality to the people. State leaders intended for the popularization of this education to help shift the intellectual and moral foundations of the people

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<sup>34</sup> "The Constitution of the Empire of Japan," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 747.

<sup>35</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 103.

into something easily utilized for state benefit. Previously in 1872, writers of the Preamble to the Fundamental Code of Education repeated the practice of separating the public from the past by referring to the traditions and policies of the Tokugawa era as something, "...that impeded the spread of culture, hampered the development of talent and accomplishments, and sowed the seeds of poverty, bankruptcy, and disrupted homes."<sup>36</sup> State leaders took very tangible consequences (poverty, bankruptcy, etc) and offered education as a means of avoiding said consequences. Still, that measure was not enough to gain unity and control of the public, as seen by the Meiji Six Society's debates and the Satsuma Rebellion. The 1872 Education Code used a combination of consequences and tying all aspects of human activity (everything from military affairs to daily communication) to education. By 1890, state leaders took a different approach that focused directly on combining intellectual and moral faculties into a civil morality.

Meiji state leaders promulgated the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890. Gluck describes the origins of the document as, "The origin of the Rescript, or more properly, of the civil morality it epitomized, was the premise that national education should serve the state."<sup>37</sup> The Meiji state's overtures towards creating a specific national identity required the success of popularizing "civil morality" through the educational system. The opening of the Rescript on Education encouraged subjects to:

... pursue learning and cultivate the arts and thereby develop  
intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public  
good and promote common interests; always respect the constitution and  
observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourself to the state (*giyu ko*)

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<sup>36</sup>"Preamble (Oseidasaresho) to the Fundamental Code of Education (Gakusei)," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 765.

<sup>37</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985): 103.

*ni hoshi*); and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our imperial throne  
coeval with heaven and earth.<sup>38</sup>

State leaders presented the development of moral and intellectual faculties as something intended to serve the good of the public and the individuals that made up that public. The wording of the appeal encouraged individuals to think of themselves as sharing common interests with other members of the community. The Imperial Rescript on Education suggested that sharing common interests benefitted the everyone, thus implying that interests not part of that commonality were detrimental to the well-being of individuals and state alike. The language of “common” forwarded the collectivism of a national identity that state leaders desired. Additionally, the Imperial Rescript on Education demanded adherence to the constitution and all laws, as well as giving up oneself in service of the state (should it be necessary).

Civil morality depended on individuals identifying themselves with the community of nation to the point of sacrificing parts of one’s agency. Philosopher Ōnishi Hajime (1864-1900) identified a conflict between the demands of civil morality in the Rescript and the individual freedoms promised in other legal documents. Historian Richard M. Reitan summarized Ōnishi’s argument that, “...if proper moral action lies solely in obedience to a command, without that command to obey or disobey, there can be no morality... and if the state succeeded in making the entire population ‘moral,’ then none could be both moral and free...”<sup>39</sup> This was one more example of the challenge of negotiating freedom and authority. If the state’s singularity of morals succeeded, then the state undermined its own claims of individual freedoms. The state tried to teach “morality” as obedience, but that definition failed to capture the various other

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<sup>38</sup> “The Opening,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2, comps. William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 780.

<sup>39</sup> Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010): 96.

forces that impact one's sense of "morality."

Education and morality continued to raise concerns as even those in favor of the Western-style learning the Meiji state favored had doubts over its consequences. Historian Thomas Haven writes, "One of the pressing questions facing the Western-oriented educator in restoration Japan was that of personal morality."<sup>40</sup> Recalling the Constitution's claim of developing intellectual and moral faculties, the challenge at hand becomes apparent. The meeting of intellectualism and morality *itself* posed a problem. Developing the intellectual faculties of the individual risked granting the public the tools to criticize the moral faculties that the state wanted to instill. The state provided a legal language of "nation" and the morals that should accompany membership in that nation, however, the public still had the power to turn that language against itself. Why was it so difficult to impact different sides of individuals at once?

For one, intellectuals disagreed on the nature of the individual as part of the state. A brief return to the Meiji Six Society reveals that first challenge. Specifically, the Meiji Six Society's argument identified the issue with influencing intellectual faculties; that if "truth" as in the "laws of Nature" does not function universally then the transfer of knowledge runs the risk of undermining the authority that implements it. Those intellectual faculties were not the only concern though. Another key piece was how intellectual development influenced morality. The relationship between those different parts of the individual related to the relationship between the agency of the individual and the authority of the state because of the role both knowledge and morality played in trying to create unity.

In his early 1900s essays, intellectual and author Takayama Chogyū analyzed exactly why attempts to influence the nature of the people were so difficult. While Chogyū did not write

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas R. H. Havens, *Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 87.



directly in response to the Satsuma Rebellion or the Constitution of 1889, the fact that he wrote about these tensions *after* both of these events is significant. It indicated that the tensions that had sparked the Satsuma Rebellion had not disappeared, nor had the Constitution of 1889 or Imperial Rescript on Education successfully created adherence to a singular national identity.<sup>41</sup> Chogyū problematized two cornerstones of state authority: “truth,” and the relationship between intellectual and moral development. To explore those issues, Chogyū split consciousness into three sections.

First, consciousness of truth, which stated that mutual exchange creates knowledge through the consensus of different subjects, thus creating an objective standard. Importantly, the concept “truth” is something that people must produce, rather than a self-evident reality. Additionally, forces outside of the individual (such as the state) can influence the knowledge of individuals by encouraging mutual acknowledgment of a proposed “truth,” be this truth that of nation, citizen, etc. Once the community establishes what constitutes knowledge, that knowledge serves as the standard by which individuals judge other ideas and information.<sup>42</sup> Next in Chogyū’s theory is aesthetic pleasure, which is based on feelings/taste, making it absolute for the individual experiencing it, and tying it intimately to self-consciousness.<sup>43</sup> That individuality of experience highlights an awareness of the self rather than a focus on a mutual standard. Aesthetic pleasure comes from the single subject’s awareness of its own feelings, while knowledge comes

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<sup>41</sup> Takayama Chogyū was influenced by his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche (please see Micheal F. Marra’s *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, 96-97). It is significant that Nietzsche wrote during the same period as the Meiji era. Nietzsche criticized truth as a generalizing metaphor that is forgotten to be a metaphor. Simply put, Nietzsche believed that truth is a human construction used to make sense of the world by generalizing differences for ease of understanding. Knowledge then relied on measuring itself by the standards of these generalizations. Furthermore, Nietzsche claimed that morality was not organic, rather people had to be socialized to a certain morality. These critiques of the contradictions of truth and morality emerged because of their role in the state building of the period. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-moral Sense.” *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 262- 65 and Friedrich Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*. Translated by Alexander Harvey. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Comp, 1908. Project Gutenberg Ebook.

<sup>42</sup> Takayama Chogyū, “Observations on Aesthetic Pleasure” *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, ed. Micheal F. Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 98-100.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

from the way one subject's perception of what is true overlaps with others subjects to affirm that knowledge.<sup>44</sup> There is another overlap though, "moral consciousness."

Morality functions through a mutually constructed understanding of what good or bad is, and the consequences of it. It serves as an objective standard through which people judge themselves and others. Morality also requires self-awareness, the same kind of absolute reality of that self-consciousness seen in the tastes of aesthetic pleasures. Chogyū demonstrated that an external force like the law cannot change the highly subjectivity personal tastes of individuals, which makes up part of their moral consciousness. The problem of influencing subjective taste, combined with the fact that the state's attempts to create a single version of "knowledge" stood on a foundation of disagreement rather than a unified consensus, demonstrated that influence comes from multiple competing sources. Thus, the state could not gain full control over the moral faculties of its public. The Imperial Rescript on Education offered the state as one purveyor of morality, but Chogyū showed that morality is much slipperier than just a command or common interests. Morality depends on the individual's own tastes/feelings as much as it depends on a shared base of knowledge with community members. Chogyū summarized,

While at the same time feeling the absoluteness of its own consciousness when facing its innerside, moral consciousness recognizes the objective standards to be obeyed when looking from the outside.... moral consciousness includes two principles - subjectivity and objectivity - that are opposite principles. To worry about, to feel reverence for, and to cooperate toward the unification and harmonization of both, this is the moral activity of humanity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 100.

Morality itself consists of oppositional forces, therefore, the state's attempts to influence the morality of the public had to contend with that friction. Between the conflict within the concept of morality, and the conflict between "nation" and individual, any identity stemming from these conversations contained those layers of opposition. The desire to create a national identity relied on trying to harmonize opposites, just like objectivity and subjectivity in Chogyū's theory. The result was that neither intellectual nor moral development contained one true path like state rhetoric suggested. Rather, both of these elements fundamentally depended on oppositional forces.

Through the tensions between the State's attempts to define the people and the intellectual responses to that definition, one can see the rejection of modern "truth" as something self-sufficient. People create truth, which means that no one truth is universally applicable. Instead of a single modern "truth," different intentions and interpretations defined themselves both in reference to and in resistance of each other. Chogyū's work echoed an intellectual trend of questioning the foundations of truth and morality. Famously, Friedrich Nietzsche struck at truth as man-made metaphor used to generalize differences.<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche also argued that a sense of morality occurred through socialization to it, with people collectively judging themselves and others.<sup>47</sup> This intellectual trend emerged precisely because *truth* and *morality* served as mediators of the relationship between state and individuals in Japan and abroad. These tensions demonstrated that opposition underlined every faculty the Meiji state attempted to utilize for a national essence. Any sense of national identity that did emerge came from the conversation

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<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-moral Sense." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 262- 65.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*. Translated by Alexander Harvey. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Comp, 1908), 100. Project Gutenberg Ebook. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38145/38145-h/38145-h.htm>

between opposing forces (knowledge, taste, morality, etc), not one force subsuming the others.

#### IV. The Literary Mirror

Popular novelists of the time like Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai also represented the tension between the state's influence and authority versus the agency of the individual in their writings. Literary production in the Meiji era started off slowly, but it began to build rapidly as translations of European works sparked Japanese writers' interest. Meiji era literature took on the unique position of both incorporating elements of Western literary techniques, and "returns" to Japanese traditions.<sup>48</sup> Literature served as another meeting place for the tensions between state and individual, in addition to the friction between Western ideology and Japanese tradition. While the Meiji State wanted to create a particular base of knowledge breaking from the "backward" past, the high literacy rate (a result of educational policy) also opened the floodgates on literature as a vehicle for alternative narratives of the relationship between people and their community. The combination of returns to tradition with new literary forms highlighted how the literary realm attempted to reconcile the tensions playing out in the social and political spheres. Ōgai and Sōseki's work served as a reflection of how people navigated the forces that contributed to their recognition of ideas like "self" and "nation."

Natsume Sōseki (1896-1916) focused on themes such as the conflict between the collectivism in the mentality of "nation," versus the agency of the individual. Sōseki studied English literature abroad and noticed that famous works, such as those by Shakespeare, did not contain the universality that Europeans claimed they did.<sup>49</sup> That realization coincided with Sōseki's belief that importing Western ideologies to help shape a unified national identity in

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Karatani Kōjin. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 18.

Japan created an uneasy relationship with the freedom of individuals to negotiate their own relationship between their self and their nation. To summarize, historian Donald Keene wrote, “His outlook differed also from that of Japanese of his day who justified their studies of Western learning in terms of service to the nation; he insisted that the purpose of education as to ‘develop inborn ability and cultivate one’s natural moral nature.’”<sup>50</sup> Debates over education highlighted education as a tool to benefit the state and the collective identity that state leaders desired. Sōseki reframed education and knowledge as a means of promoting the agency of the individual. Sōseki’s writing emphasized the contradictions within the methods the Meiji state utilized to achieve its goals.

In his 1905-7 novel, *I Am a Cat*, Sōseki’s feline narrator mocked Meiji society, namely the uneasy balance between Japanese traditions and imported Western ideologies. For example, the cat is highly critical of the conceited nature of human knowledge. It says, “And you should wish to learn about cats, only a cat can tell you. Humans, however advanced, can tell you nothing on this subject. As inasmuch humans are, in fact far less advanced than they fancy themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Through this barb, Sōseki’s cat indicates the problem with trying to apply any given ideology as if it were universal. British, American, or German political structures could not precisely fit the experience of the Japanese subject. Just as only a “cat” can teach one all there is to know about felines, only the experience of Japanese individuals could reveal the specific nature of the relationship between the Meiji state and its public. Sōseki gestured to the fact that Meiji state leaders’ attempts to teach the public about themselves (i.e. to influence the nature of each individual in terms of knowledge and morality) did not create unity, rather state leaders

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<sup>50</sup> Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 308

<sup>51</sup> Sōseki Natsume. *I Am a Cat*. Translated by Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson. (Rutland: Tuttle, 1972), 50.

attempted to smother dissenting voices under the illusion of a singular nation identity.

In a similar vein Sōseki's cat says of its master, "Like an ill-natured oyster, he secrets himself in his study and has never once opened his mouth to the outside world. And to see him there looking as though he alone has truly attained enlightenment, is enough to make a cat laugh."<sup>52</sup> In this instance the schoolteacher played the role of the Meiji state, demonstrating the illusion that the state alone held the knowledge of how individuals and the state should interact. Sōseki's critique emphasized a point Chogyū made, that knowledge becomes an objective standard only through mutual exchange. The State could not claim any truth derived from knowledge, if that knowledge did not ever engage with that of the individuals the state presided over. Crafting a specific Japanese subjectivity appeared much simpler if one kept alternative versions closed off behind discourses like "rebellion," "ignorance," and evil traditions." Even though Meiji state makers did attempt to fit and curate Western ideologies for Japan, Sōseki's criticism echoed the criticisms of dissenting voices who charged the Meiji State with autocracy, despite its supposed value of ideas of assembly and public discussion.

Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) struck at the same tension Soseki noticed, but he approached it a little differently. Ōgai received training in Confucianism and martial arts and traveled to Germany to continue his studies of medicine.<sup>53</sup> The diversity of Ōgai's experience is reminiscent of how Ōgai navigated the relationship between individuals and community in his writing. Karatani Kōjin summarized Ōgai's style as, "In Ōgai's writing the "self" has no substance, it is an 'assemblage of threads pulled together from different directions,' precisely what Marx prescribed in *The German Ideology* as 'a totality of diverse relationships.'<sup>54</sup> While I agree with

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 356.

<sup>54</sup> Karatani Kōjin. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 71.

Karatani's claim that Ōgai created his characters by pulling together a variety of experiences, I disagree that the self has "no substance" in Ōgai's work. The "self" *acquires* substance from the "diverse relationships" pulled together to make that character. That process of acquisition reflected the ways individuals shaped their identity in reference to their relationship with the authority of the state and their community. All the tensions laid out in the political and intellectual documents took up residence within individuals through their interaction with their environment. Ōgai's novels allowed readers to watch the friction between individuals and outside relationships play out in a manner that spoke to the underlying contradictions involved in making a modern nation-state.

In 1911, Ōgai began serially publishing *The Wild Geese*. The novel is set in 1880 and contains three important characters. Otama, the mistress of Suezō, who entered the arrangement because Suezō agreed to provide for her father. Next is Suezō, an already married money-lender. Finally, the main character is Okada, a medical student who first notices Otama when he is taking a walk.<sup>55</sup> Ōgai's main character, Okada, is not, however, the greatest interest in the novel. Instead, Ōgai built his literary world around the places where different characters and symbols intersect. Those points of interaction demonstrated how power, authority, and individuality always worked in relation to others.

For example, at the beginning of *The Wild Geese* Otama has very little agency. She defines her identity through her desire to help her father, and through Suezō's possession of her. She admits it is humiliating to "belong" to a moneylender like Suezō, but more so than that she "...had such a sense, it was that of the unfairness of her own destiny. She had done nothing

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<sup>55</sup> Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 369

wrong, yet she was to be persecuted by the world.”<sup>56</sup> In this line Otama characterizes her identity as one lacking agency, however, it is relations with others that impose that powerlessness. Otama is not without power on her own, rather she is without power in comparison to other forces and subjects. Namely, her societal duty to be filial to her father that presses her to enter the engagement with Suezō. The same way Otama feels ensnared by her arrangement with Suezō, individuals’ relationship to “nation” places them in a similar kind of arrangement. The Meiji state promoted a specific type of identity (and accompanying morality and base of knowledge) that became a contract with the public through the codification of power presented in the Constitution. The arrangement between the state as the authority of *nation* and the individual, placed the individual in a position of being relatively weak compared to the state. The state leaders decided upon the laws, knowledge, and morals that the public should be held accountable for. As the public engaged with that dialogue, whether by resistance or adherence, they embedded those values within themselves. By interacting with both state authority and the concept of “nation,” individuals defined themselves in part through how they interpreted the balanced the relation between their power as one “self” versus the power of the state.

That arrangement of power was not, however, entirely static. Although the Meiji state leaders attempted to monopolize violence, their difficulty in gaining complete control over a single national identity left room for divergence. The diverse relationships that constitute the self and its subjectivity do not engage once and then vanish. They continuously affect those they are in contact with. Even relations bound up in political and legal control were flexible.

Returning to *The Wild Geese*, Otama learns how to use others from the same relations

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<sup>56</sup> Mori Ōgai, *The Wild Geese*. Translated by Kingo Ochiai and Sanford Goldstein. 2nd ed. (North Clarendon: Tuttle, 2009), 46-7.



that used her. Despite her earlier lamentation of her lack of agency, she figures out how to manipulate her place within the community for her own benefit. She learned to “buy” her neighbors by exchanging things like food for copybooks to practice writing.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Otama ceases to treat Suezō as if she owed him gratitude or affection. That change came after a particular realization, “She would be with him in the room, but her real self was detached, watching the scene from the side. And there it would deride first Suezō and then the other Otama for being under his control.”<sup>58</sup> It is important that Otama references a split in her “self.” She critiques both Suezō, who has helped define her relation to herself, and the part of her that “allows” for that control. Furthermore, Otama identifies that there are different layers of her “self.” She is one person, but she contains the traces of different influences. This process is not only applicable to Ogai’s novel. It works in regards to national identity. The state affected the people’s subjectivity through the relationship between the government and its citizens. The Constitution, education policies and other legal institutions defined parts of each individual’s “self” in relation to the state. However, neither the state nor individuals could claim their identity separate from the other.

One of the most striking scenes of *The Wild Geese* drives home the connection between state authority and individual freedom. The scene centers on a snake forcing itself into a bird cage and eating one bird. Ōgai wrote, “...the bird had not been alone. The mate to the one fluttering about was trapped in the snake’s mouth.”<sup>59</sup> The snake is the creature in control of violence, however, it is only able to capture one of the two birds. While the snake holds one bird in its mouth, the other bird is still flying around. Just as Otama implied her identity contained

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 76-7

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 86-7.

multiple parts, the two birds mirror that. Even when part of an individual's identity remains stuck in the jaws of state authority, another part of that same identity is the bird that remains uncaught. The tensions behind “truth,” “nature,” and the power of the state versus the freedom of the individual, made it impossible for the Meiji state to completely swallow the real multiplicity of national identity.

The clarity of conflict as a theme in literature shows that the modern condition was not simply the creation of a modern state with modern subjects, but the connected process founded on fighting over questions of what makes a public, how does the State exert control, and what type of “truth” exists when everything sits on a moving foundation. Trying to create any sort of true identity relies on the inherent disagreement and diversity of forces pushing and pulling on each other. The universality that Meiji state leaders tried to find with their policies was never the singular identity they depicted, rather, the universal was the plurality of tensions and forces.

## **V. Final Connections**

The plurality that appeared in everything from politics to literature created a condition where all the possible outcomes, future fascism or otherwise, were a part of the same coin. One can flip that coin over and over again and get different results because of the dynamic nature of the tensions under the surface of the making of a modern nation-state. The continuity from Charter Oath of 1868 through the early twentieth-century novels of Ōgai and Sōseki did not stem from the unanimous triumph of one national identity, or a linear progression towards “modernity.” Instead, what remained consistent were the questions asked and the debates fought.

The presumption of Meiji state leaders that a national essence was vital to progress carried with it a tangled network of ideologies and counter-ideologies. What does “nation” mean to the individual? How do freedom and authority exist together? What function does claiming

any sort of truth-based knowledge serve when truth itself is not simply objective, but subjective as well? These questions underscored the challenges inherent in crafting a modern nation-state. The fighting that went into answering those questions consisted of fighting *with* opposing views more so than fighting *against*. For example, state policy intended to cultivate faithful subjects emerged alongside the alternative subjectivities that the state wanted to suppress.<sup>60</sup> Wrestling over what constituted an ideal Japanese subject relied on alternative versions of that subject to conceptualize what the ideal identity of citizens should look like. The Charter Oath of 1868 relied on the practices and policies of the Tokugawa Bakufu as a point of contrast to define the emergence of the Meiji state. The Constitution of 1889 relied on friction between individuals and the state to insert itself as a bridge between the two. The Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) needed differing opinions on morality and knowledge to assert state leaders' version as the correct interpretation.

It may sound counterintuitive that the state-building process required tension, but the creation of the modern nation-state rests on navigating the relationship between state authority and individual freedom. The Meiji state legitimated itself *both* through its harnessing of power and violence, and its promotion of individual rights and freedoms. These two sides are inherently contradictory, yet they both served as foundations of the modern nation-state. The conflict between individual and state, single or multiple, and truth and the absence of it created the conversation that actually built what it meant to be a Japanese subject in the Meiji Era. Without the plurality of voices, there would not have been the driving force required to create the dynamic state of national and individual identity. Politicians, intellectuals, authors, and the general public each contributed to those identities because they worked within the sphere of

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<sup>60</sup> Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 114.

thought. Political policy responded to the needs of the state for unity, but in doing so sparked opposition. Intellectual debate challenged how one defines the public in service of the nation, and how truth and morality converge in support or resistance of that definition. Literature mirrored the conflicts of lived-experience in a manner that highlighted how the foundations of nation and identity are relational. Not only were politics, intellectualism, and literature connected, they all embodied different sides of the same dialogue that defined the transitions of the Meiji period.

Additional research concerning public responses would further how one understands the relationship between public and nation. This project focused specifically on the interplay of forces *within* Japan to demonstrate how plurality is the foundation of the nation-state, but another possibility for further work is a greater focus on international relations. The foundation of the modern nation-state is too often taken for granted, and exposing the different layers and contradictions within it allows one to analyze how the relationship between public and state changes and develops throughout different periods and conditions. It is this relationship that continues to inform the interaction between people, community, and nation around the globe in the present moment.

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