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Author(s): Conrad Totman
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Ethnicity in the Meiji Restoration

An Interpretive Essay

by CONRAD TOTMAN

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 separated two dramatically dissimilar epochs in Japanese history. Castles, samurai, a decentralized political system, and a policy of national isolation stood on one side of the event; heavy industry, citizen soldiers, a unitary regime headed by an authoritarian emperor, and an era of empire building stood on the other. Despite the clarity of the differences, however, historians do not find it easy to agree on why the Restoration worked out as it did or how one most intelligently thinks about the event.

One interpretive problem is to explain how samurai whose conduct had been rooted in an ideal of feudal loyalty to their domanial lord could in brief compass evolve into nationalists whose conduct was rooted in a sense of patriotism. On the face of it at least, feudal loyalty and nationalism appear to be generically dissimilar, one a characteristic of ‘traditional’ society, the other a characteristic of ‘modern’ society; the one a vertical, privatized, and particularistic I-thee relationship, the other a horizontal, public, and universalistic we-together relationship. If one views the feudal-nationalist relationship in terms of ethnicity, however, it permits one to see these motivational patterns in more comparable terms and thereby to put the Restoration in a new light.

The Author is Professor in the Department of History, Northwestern University.

1 One of the best discussions in English of this problem of feudal loyalty and nationalism is Albert Craig, Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration, Harvard U.P., 1961. Craig speaks of feudal loyalty in Tokugawa Japan as having become a loyalty to the daimyo as a status figure, an institutionalized loyalty that was unconditional, impersonal, and vertical. He edges toward ethnicity by saying that it ‘could almost, if not quite, be described as “han nationalism” ’ (p. 148). But then, wary of the thorns in the semantic bush of nationalism, he beats a retreat to ‘what may be termed free floating loyalty’.

This, it seems to me, is an unhelpful formulation because loyalty in Tokugawa Japan was not free-floating. It had a definite focus above and roots within. Craig has it right when he points out that although ‘nationalism’ may not be the best word, ‘A personal identification with the han and some sense of participation in its affairs . . . did exist’ (p. 148). What was also true, however, and therefore needs to be added, was that in appropriate contexts samurai could feel similarly about Japan, the imperial realm.
Ethnicity: Dimensions of the Concept

During the past fifteen years social scientists have acquired a lively interest in the subject of ethnicity. One expression of that interest is a volume of essays edited in 1975 by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan. Their volume examines the theory and evidence of ethnicity in contemporary global society and furnishes numerous insights but, happily, no rigid theory about phenomena covered by that rubric.

Glazer and Moynihan speak of ethnicity as 'the character or quality of an ethnic group', or 'the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group'. They speak of ethnic groups, in turn, as 'groups of a society characterized by a distinct sense of difference owing to culture and descent', and they suggest that ethnic groups are not merely survivals from an earlier age but, 'may be forms of social life that are capable of renewing and transforming themselves.' They make reference to 'the steady expansion of the term “ethnic group” from minority and marginal subgroups at the edges of society . . . to major elements of a society.' And they note that 'interest is pursued effectively by ethnic groups today as well as by interest-defined groups,' and so, 'we find the ethnic group defined in terms of interest, as an interest group.'

The editors conclude that groups originally defined in terms of religious, linguistic, or concrete cultural differences can preserve a sense of identity capable of serving as a basis for mobilization. Accordingly, they believe that

... there is some legitimacy to finding that forms of identification based on social realities as different as religion, language, and national origin all have something in common, such that a new term is coined to refer to all of them—'ethnicity.' What they have in common is that they have all become effective foci for group mobilization for concrete political ends challenging the primacy for such mobilization of class on the one hand and nation on the other.

Indeed,

As a political idea, as a mobilizing principle, ethnicity in our time has spread round the world with the curious consequence of sameness and difference that is encountered with other such phenomena. A common rhetoric attaches to widely disparate conditions, with luxuriantly varied results.

In sum, then, the editors are working with a term identifying groups whose 'groupness' is based on varied and quite imprecise criteria. They note that the word has broadened rather than narrowed in terms of the phenomena it embraces. They observe that ethnicity has some degree of mutational capability, and that it can function to serve the interests of group members.

3 Glazer & Moynihan, pp. 1, 4, 5, & 7.  
4 Glazer & Moynihan, p. 18.  
5 Glazer & Moynihan, p. 20.
Glazer and Moynihan treat ethnicity in terms of 'sub-national' groups, but their treatment of the term suggests that it need not necessarily be limited to such groups. Rather, the sensibility we identify as 'nationalism' appears to be just another form of ethnicity. What seems basically to distinguish national and sub-national levels of ethnicity in 'modern' nation-states is not their content but their operative context. Ethnicity at the national level can express itself through the state structure and be sustained by that structure. Sub-national ethnicity, by contrast, leads a rather fugitive existence, usually lacking a durable organization of its own and often experiencing some degree of persecution at the hands of the state. Hence those who would give expression to their sub-national ethnic sensibility must resort to such tactics and structures as they can devise.

In a particularly helpful essay, Daniel Bell adds instructive insights. He reminds us that

... most people have multiple social attachments which crosscut one another, and these sociological designations can be emphasized or minimized depending upon the situation in which the individual finds himself.

He points out, 'The question of what one is, is not only a matter of one's choice, but the label of others as well.' And he goes on,

At particular times—but usually in relation to an adversary, which gives it its political character—one specific identification becomes primary and overriding and prompts one to join a particular group; or, one is forced into a group by the action of others.

Bell observes,

Analytically speaking, there are two kinds of social movements: symbolic and expressive movements whose ties are primarily affective; and instrumental groups whose actions are bound up by a set of common, usually material, interests.

He then speaks of class and ethnicity as the two 'modes of coherent group feeling' that most effectively 'combine symbolic and instrumental purposes'. However, '... more often than not, in the advanced countries at least, ethnicity cuts across class lines,' and, 'where class issues become attenuated, and communal questions come to the fore, understandably, the ethnic tie becomes more salient.'

Then, by way of drawing his thoughts together, Bell writes,

What I think is clear is that ethnicity, in this [recent historical] context, is best understood not as a primordial phenomenon in which deeply held identities have to re-emerge, but as a strategic choice by individuals who, in other circumstances, would

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6 In his essay on western Europe, William Petersen uses the term 'subnation' to describe the many recent ethnic movements of that area. Glazer & Moynihan, p. 177 ff.
7 Bell's comments are taken from Glazer & Moynihan, pp. 153, 159, 165–66, 168, & 171. Orlando Patterson in another good essay in the same book, p. 305 ff, shares many of Bell's views.
choose other group memberships as a means of gaining some power and privilege. In short, it is the salience not the persona which has to be the axial line for explanation.

To Bell, then, ethnicity is but one of several levels or forms of group identity that a person may hold at a given moment. It can be particularly effective for promoting action, but whether or not it becomes a motivational force will depend on its salience for the alleviation of worries or pursuit of felt desires.

A few more helpful insights on ethnicity can be obtained from a paper on Celtic nationalist movements prepared by Jack E. Reece.8 Reece suggests that the contemporary surge of Scottish and Welsh nationalist movements can be attributed to economic hardships arising from the collapse of the British global imperial role and to the failure of London governments, absorbed in their own problems, to respond to demands for home rule.

In any case, it occurred to ever larger numbers of Scots and Welshmen that prosperity might be more quickly restored to their homelands if presumably better-informed local officials played active roles in decision-making processes that directly affected Scottish and Welsh economic interests.

Reece further suggests,

The powerful conviction that they participated in something called British culture, that they therefore possessed British nationality, as a matter of fact helped check for centuries the development of ethnic minority nationalism among the Scottish and Welsh peoples. And in retrospect it is clear that the existence of the British Empire had a lot to do with making the notion of 'Britishness' possible in the first place. The English, Scots, Welsh and Irish together built the empire and it in turn helped fashion the British.

The gratifying results of their combined effort did not, however, endure.

So it happens today that English, Scots and Welsh—released from their common British identity—suspectiously eye each other across their historic frontiers and self-consciously wonder 'how on earth they could have found so much in common for so long.'9

Reece, whose own monographic work has focused on Breton nationalism, argues that an analogous situation exists in Brittany. He also suggests that the bureaucratized central regimes of modern France and Britain have pursued policies of economic planning that have, however unintentionally, reduced peripheral areas to lower economic levels than the center. He argues that this situation, too, has fueled Celtic nationalist movements. And finally, Reece speculates,

9 Reece, pp. 17, 18, & 20. Reece here is quoting William Greenberg.
It may even be that the disaggregation of traditional state formations into smaller ethnic units will turn out to be the first step in the reorganization of Europe into a continental federation of 'little peoples.' From diversity, after all, there often springs the notion of unity. . . . From this perspective, then, the emergence and triumph of ethnic minority nationalism in Brittany, Scotland and Wales would appear more directed toward the living future than to the dead past as its adversaries so often charge.10

Tokugawa Japan is not modern Europe, of course, and it would be reckless to try to draw any direct analogies between the two. Nonetheless Reece's argument that Celtic nationalism, or ethnicity to use the other term, springs from the attenuation and malfunction of the larger polity, that it has both symbolic and instrumental dimensions, and that it does not preclude future reintegration at higher social levels, does suggest interesting ways to think about the Meiji Restoration.

Glazer and Moynihan doubtless would frown upon an attempt to look at the Restoration in terms of ethnicity. They contend that it is a new phenomenon produced by the particular configuration of our own age. I would suggest, however, that one can perceive in Japan of the 1850s and 1860s a configuration that had characteristics sufficiently analogous to those the editors discuss, so that if we bear in mind the points made by Bell and Reece, it seems warranted to examine the Restoration in terms of ethnicity.

The Meiji Restoration as a Manifestation of Ethnicity

The Meiji Restoration has been treated in many ways.11 It has been viewed as the product of a confrontation between Western imperialism and Japanese nationalism.12 It has been treated in terms of a confrontation between feudalism and capitalism, some seeing bourgeois elements displacing anachronistic feudal forces, others seeing a sinister outcome in which feudal and bourgeois elements struck an unholy alliance at the expense of the masses.13 Some have linked the themes of capitalism and imperialism in terms of international monopoly capitalism confronting Japanese feudalism.14 Others have analyzed the Restoration more precisely in terms of dissatisfied lower-ranking samurai overthrowing their masters and forging a new polity.15 The themes of internal decay and external threat have

12 See, for example Ishii Shiryō Hensan Jimukyoku, ed., Ishin Shi 終末, Meiji Shoin, 1941, 5 vols.
13 See, for example, the complex analysis in Tōyama Shigeki 遠山茂樹, Meiji Ishin 明治維新, Iwanami Shoten, 1951.
14 See, for example, Ishii Takashi 石井孝, Zōtei Meiji Ishin no Kokusaiteki Kankyō 増訂明治維新の国際的環境, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1966.
15 This theme is ably developed in E. H. Norman, Japan's Emergence as a Modern State, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1940. Norman's essay is also available in John W. Dower, ed., Origins of the Modern Japanese State, Pantheon, 1975.
been integrated in intellectual terms as the collapse of one normative order and its replacement by another,\(^{16}\) or as a process in which culturally enlightened elements displaced reactionary forces.\(^{17}\) In another formulation the domestic and foreign themes have been linked in terms of dissident feudal groups—the great baronies—prompted by domanial ambition and by alarm at the imperialist intrusion, rebelling against their decadent liege lord, the Tokugawa shogun, and doing so successfully precisely because of the solidity of the feudal order in their domains.\(^{18}\)

These several formulations differ in their particulars, but they all perceive Japanese society essentially in terms of three basic group-configurations. One configuration is that of Japan as an entity interacting with external entities. Another is that of Japan divided vertically into feudal baronies (han 藩). The third is that of Japan riven horizontally along class or status lines. Most studies of the Restoration regard all three group-configurations as real, and differences of interpretation essentially constitute differing assessments of the specific manifestations, patterns of interaction, and relative importance of the three to the political outcome.

The Restoration has thus been explained in many ways, but not in terms of ethnicity as the term is currently used. Yet such an approach does seem to have merit. On the surface its merit does not lie in any obvious promise of a radically new interpretation; to the contrary, it appears to be little more than a semantic manipulation, a substitution of the word ‘ethnicity’ for the words ‘nationalism’ and ‘feudal loyalty’. It is more than just that, however, because it takes advantage of the truism that one’s choice of words shapes one’s conceptual categories, which in turn influence one’s perception of relationships. Use of the term ethnicity gives us a clearer sense of how the two group-configurations of nation and feudal domain articulated with one another. And it suggests, too, how the third configuration, that based on patterns of status cleavage, became subordinated to considerations of ethnicity in shaping the historic outcome. Insofar as we develop a clearer sense of how domanial and national orientations articulated, we shall also shed light on two specific and perplexing questions: (1) How could samurai defy their lords or even plot against their han leaders, while still protesting the perfectness of their feudal loyalty and the purity of their motives? (2) How could there be a substantial literature of the day focusing on the crisis of the ‘country’—the *kuni* 国 or *kokka* 国家—in which reference was at least as often to one’s *han* as to Japan, with no apparent sense of ambiguity in the writer’s mind?\(^{19}\)

\(^{16}\) The major statement of this theme is found in Harry D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan*, University of California Press, 1970.

\(^{17}\) This view, originally the interpretation of the victors, has recently been given a provocative and insightful revitalization by Thomas Huber in his study of Chôshû activists in the 1850s and 1860s, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan*, Stanford U.P., 1981.

\(^{18}\) Craig has developed this theme in the work cited in n. 1, above.

\(^{19}\) The problem of determining what the term *kuni* means is nicely illustrated in Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryôma and the Meiji Restoration*, Princeton U.P., 1961. In translat-
1. *Ethnicity in Tokugawa Japan*

The point of departure for an examination of the role of ethnicity in the Meiji Restoration is an examination of ethnicity in Tokugawa society. The ambiguity of the term *kuni* is a key to understanding because the two orientations that the term embodies are essentially those of national and domanial ethnicity. In its heyday from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries Tokugawa society sustained both levels of ethnicity, much as Imperial Britain in its heyday permitted people to see themselves as British and at the same time Scottish, Welsh, or whatever. There was, however, a crucial difference between the social foundation of Tokugawa ethnicity and that of Reec's Britain. In Britain the state was Great Britain, and the lower-level identification of Scot, Welsh, or Irish had to exist as a cultural-linguistic phenomenon lacking expression as a state. In Tokugawa Japan a nearly opposite situation attained. The 250-odd *han* were the real state structures, complete with governmental organizations and regulations, armies, systems of taxation, and the authority to maintain and operate these state apparatuses. There was no encompassing Japanese state, and national ethnicity was in consequence primarily a cultural-linguistic phenomenon analogous to the Scot-Welsh-Irish phenomenon in Britain.

The *han* were state structures, but they were also much more than that. They were also the principal mechanisms shaping and sustaining a conscious awareness of domanial distinctiveness. Actually these 'domanial' distinctions were only partially differences among *han*; in part they were expressions of less clearly demarcated geographical variations (for instance, a dialect of south Kyushu or of the northern Japan Sea coastal area). Such regional differences tended to be seen as provincial distinctions, as for example in the case of most folk songs. However, since the greatest *han* were identified with the ancient provinces (*kuni*) in which they were located—for example, Kaga, Echizen, Owari, Kii, Bizen, Aki, Tosa, Hizen, Higo, Satsuma—there was a blending of regional, provincial, and domanial factors that furnished the substance of what I am designating 'domanial ethnicity'. Inter-domanial differences were real and evident, more so among the larger,

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20 Just as Craig is reluctant to speak of 'han nationalism', so I am reluctant to speak of a nationalism in Japan in the eighteenth century. Partly this is for the reason suggested in my discussion of nationalism as ethnicity and partly because of two other considerations.

First, nationalism is defined in several ways, sometimes quite inflexibly, and enough of these definitions make its application to Tokugawa society inappropriate so that its use here risks generating too many unhelpful semantic disputes. Second, the term is so heavily burdened with both celebratory and pejorative connotations that its use can easily be misconstrued and its expository utility thereby sabotaged. Ethnicity, by contrast, is a term that has not yet been cast in bronze by disputatious scholars and has not acquired such halo or horns as to make its dispassionate use difficult.

21 Perhaps it was the ethnic character of domanial identity that led foreign and Japanese observers to refer for so long to the *han*, when writing in English, as 'clans'.
more stable, and more storied han than among lesser ones. There were ever-present and consciously recognized differences of dialect, of daily habits, of custom and tradition, and of domanial heritage. And those differences were reinforced by the enduring and indisputably domanial facts of structural autonomy, service obligations, and personal associations based on domanial origins. A samurai’s self-identity as member of a domain was formally articulated in terms of loyalty to his lord, and it was given sacred expression in rituals commemorating his lord’s ancestors. Clearly, however, samurai recognized that their self-identity was domanial in reality, and that it was so because the domain as an institutional entity was the foundation of their own well-being. Actions that touched the landed standing of a han, such as the transfer of one’s lord to another castle or the transfer of land from one lord to another, touched the lives of han vassals and could precipitate vigorous samurai agitation. In short, considerations of self-interest and doctrinal propriety found a common base in the domain, so that both practical and ideological factors worked to sustain domanial ethnicity. In consequence of these several considerations, while every samurai and many a commoner did know that he was Japanese, as distinct from Chinese, Koreans, or others commonly lumped together as ‘barbarians’, he was more routinely conscious of being a person of such and such a domain.

As the previous sentence suggests, there was another level of ethnicity, that of the ‘nation’. Its institutional expression was extremely weak. At the center was a powerless symbolic Imperial Court in the city of Kyoto. In the city of Edo was the Tokugawa shogunal government, or bakufu, which was basically a domanial regime or ‘super-han’ with only limited suzerain peace-keeping authority vis-à-vis the daimyo. Giving coherence to this polycentric administrative order was a widespread similarity in the structures and procedures of bakufu and han governments that provided considerable supra-domanial commonality of experience for those engaged in state-related activities. The whole decentralized order was bound together politically by a set of shared interests among high-ranking samurai and by those few structural restraints imposed on the han by the bakufu.

This fragile political cohesion was reinforced by other expressions of cultural uniformity that were basic to the sense of national ethnicity. These uniformities included a shared set of ethical propositions about the character of the good society and a common set of organizational principles and forms that embraced the whole populace. They also included a structurally identifiable, cross-cutting, but fictively symbiotic set of social groupings—samurai, peasants, artisans, merchants, and smaller groups such as nobles, priests, and outcasts. Other ex-


23 See, for instance, the agitation surrounding transfer of Mizuno Tadakuni’s fief to Hamamatsu in 1762, as reported in Kitajima Masamoto 北島正元, Mizuno Tadakuni 水野忠邦, Yoshikawa Kōbun, 1969. The case of Matsumae fief is referred to in Conrad Totman, Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868, University Press of Hawaii, 1980, pp. 179 & 502, n. 4.
pressions of cultural uniformity included an accumulated corpus of historic literature and consequently a group-historic personality, a distinctive language, and an outer boundary clearly marked by the Tokugawa shogunate’s restrictive foreign policy, commonly called a policy of seclusion (sakoku 鎖国).

These elements constituted the stuff of ‘Japaneseness’, and they were consciously recognized. Samurai, together with a steadily growing number of commoners, were conscious of the character of their society, perceiving it as different in important ways—in language, history, culture, and government—from Korea, China, and other alien lands. While Tokugawa Japanese were more routinely conscious of themselves as members of a domain than of Japan, the cultural gulf they saw separating their society from those across the sea was far greater than what they saw distinguishing one region or domain of Japan from another.

Ethnicity existed, then, at two levels, that of the domain and that of the nation. Despite its two foci, however, one may speak of Tokugawa ethnicity as a single phenomenon, a quiescent and largely harmonious bi-level ethnicity. The two levels were harmonious in part because political theory of the day spelled out nicely how the hōken (‘feudal’ or decentralized) polity of Tokugawa Japan promoted local well-being, which directly assured the well-being of the larger society, and hence why a hōken system was preferable to a gunken or unitary bureaucratic state, which tended to promote egoism and disorder. Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠, one of the most influential thinkers of seventeenth-century Japan, put it this way:

In a hōken 封建 state [such as ours] the country is divided up among feudal lords [shokō 諸公], and only a small part of it is ruled directly by the Emperor [tenshi 天子]. The retainers [shin 臣] of the feudal lords receive hereditary emoluments and hold land in fief [chigyōsho 知行所] which descends from generation to generation. Although exceptional men may be given advancement, in general a man’s position is determined by his status at birth [bungen 分限]. . . . Thus a hōken age is one in which men’s minds are fixed and settled. Law is little developed and rule is based on personal obligation between superior and inferior, while the greatest consideration is given to the preservation of a sense of honour. The feudal lords and their senior retainers rule over their lands as their own property.

In a gunken 郡県 state there are no feudal lords and the gentlemen [shi 士] and ministers [taifu 大夫] hold their positions only during their own lifetimes. They hold no land in fief and receive only small emoluments in the form of a salary [kirimai-tori nite 切り取りにて]. They are attended by a large number of subordinate officials through whom they exercise their rule. . . . Since the Emperor allocates the governorships of the provinces at three-yearly intervals, it is generally the case that first

24 Alternatively one may speak of this bi-level ethnicity as a potential yet to be realized. The disadvantage of that formulation is that it seems to weaken possible linkages back to the motivational configuration of the pre-sakoku and pre-Sekigahara eras. In essays published recently, Sasaki Junnosuke and Katsumata Shizuo examine structural, legal, and ideological aspects of the emergence of han and central governments in the pre-Sekigahara era, in John W. Hall et al., ed., Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500 to 1650, Princeton U.P., 1981.
consideration is given to anything which promises immediate results. Since it is possible for a man born among the peasantry to advance to the position of one of the chief ministers in the state, all men have a great desire to obtain advancement to the positions of gentleman and minister.²⁵

Ogyû’s analysis of why a hōken system was superior to a gunken polity explained in effect why diligent attention to the governance of one’s own domain was the very essence of the larger society’s well-being. It constituted a rationalization of the sensibility that we have identified as a harmonious bi-level ethnicity. And doubtless it was the resultant difficulty in conceiving of domanial and national interests as separate and antagonistic categories that prompted men to use the term kuni to mean both.

This perception of han and national interests as being coterminous was legitimized by political thought, but what ultimately sustained it in a quiescent state was the perpetuation of a situational context in which the two levels of interest could coexist. As long as this context lasted, Tokugawa ethnicity, the consciousness of being Japanese and also of being a member of a certain domain, did not give optimal expression to any enduring and serious concerns. As long, for example, as men of Karatsu did not feel seriously threatened by neighboring Chôshû, or Tsu did not fear Wakayama, or Chôshû did not suspect the Tokugawa in Edo of greater hegemonial ambitions, domanial ethnicity did not serve as an effective stimulus to political activism. And as long as the central values and evidences of civilization remained secure and the policy of seclusion went unchallenged, national ethnicity similarly remained quiescent. To use Bell’s word, neither was salient as an enduring source of motivation.

During the eighteenth century motivation for political action seems usually to have derived from more salient considerations, such as individual loyalty to one’s leader or factional group, professional integrity, family honor and interest, status-group interest, or ideology. Political conflicts within the domains (called oie sôdô 御家騒動) would pit group against group, sometimes with great harshness, but while the issues at stake were many and varied, the notion that one’s han was threatened by an outsider such as an overweening neighbor was not a noteworthy theme. And within the bakufu political conflicts were also common enough, but few were articulated in terms of either a daimyo threat to the bakufu or a foreign threat to Japan.

2. The Gestation of Active Ethnicity

Our point of departure, then, envisages in eighteenth-century Japan a quiescent, harmonious bi-level ethnicity rooted in the accumulated cultural tradition, the structure and power relationships of the bakuhan 幕藩 (bakufu plus han) order, and the political concept of a hōken, or decentralized, political system. During

the last decades of the Tokugawa period Japanese society began to experience stresses that activated this quiescent ethnicity. The process eventually involved activation of both domanial and national levels of sentiment, with more and more samurai finding that the well-being of their *han* vis-à-vis the bakufu or other *han*, or the well-being of their country vis-à-vis foreigners, was what most concerned them. To the disbelief and dismay of many, moreover, the process sooner or later revealed that the two concerns were not inherently one, that indeed they could even be mutually contradictory. The realization that what was good for Japan was not necessarily good for one’s domain, whether *han* or bakufu, had revolutionary implications. The political history of late Tokugawa Japan can be viewed, therefore, as the process of activation of this bi-level ethnicity, and then, the interaction of the two resulting levels of consciousness and their relationship to status tensions.

One can usefully date this gestation of active ethnicity from about the 1780s, when the social foundations of the *bakuhan* system began to disintegrate. The dimensions of disintegration are not yet well understood, but they probably involved several factors. They touched all three group configurations involved in the Restoration, those of Japan, baronies, and status groups. To elaborate, class and status tensions were exacerbated by shifts in control of the countryside, by a rising level of rural political consciousness and education, and by a changing rural-urban balance of economic power in favor of the hinterland. Consciousness of Japan was fostered by a growing perception of the imperial institution as a uniquely Japanese entity deserving of special respect, by a spreading awareness of the escalating foreign presence in surrounding seas, and by a growing conviction that domestic difficulties were of nationwide scope and required nationwide remedies. Domanial consciousness was stimulated by a growing tendency among bakufu and *han* leaders to adopt ‘beggar-thy-neighbor’ policies as they tried to cope with their domestic governmental difficulties and strengthen their defenses against foreigners abroad and malcontents below.

These several developments worked at cross-purposes. On the one hand they created fears that the larger society and its essential virtues were in jeopardy, and on the other they suggested that more immediate interests also required forceful

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attention and were not in any case adequately secured by the established order and its executors. Consequently they generated demands that leaders stem the deterioration by coping with the problems of the whole order even while prompting people in both bakufu and han to focus attention on their own local problems and even willfully to adopt policies yet more disadvantageous to one another. These patterns were evident in the policies of the bakufu leader Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 in the 1790s; they were even more pronounced in the several han reforms and the bakufu reform of the Tempo period, the 1830s and 1840s. They also stood out sharply in the quarrels and jockeying that accompanied debate and action on foreign policy and coastal defense strategy. In consequence they fostered both national and domanial levels of ethnicity but did so in irregular and inconstant ways.

The emerging national consciousness is evident at both intellectual and political levels. Among intellectuals one manifestation was a devaluing of Chinese civilization in favor of Japanese. A more dynamic manifestation was concern with the growing Western menace. Scholars of Mito han, such as Aizawa Yasushi 会沢安 and Fujita Tōko 藤田東湖, repeatedly warned of the alien menace to the imperial realm. Many other observers, such as Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤, Honda Toshiaki 本田利明, Mamiya Rinzō 間宮林蔵, Ōshio Heihachirō 大塩平八郎, Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山, and Satō Nobuhiro 佐藤信淵, also manifested in their arguments and activities the awakening concern with Japanese well-being. In their writings, however, even when the issues at stake were clearly national in scope, one can often detect an ambiguity about the focus of concern, with domain and nation still being regarded more or less indivisibly as the repository of virtue, tradition, and interest that must be secured. As a motivational foundation for intellectual activity, national consciousness was evidently being activated without bringing the nation-domain distinction clearly into focus.

Among political leaders there also was a growing awareness of national problems, notably Russian encroachment from the north and later maritime intrusion along Japan’s Pacific coast. Increasingly during the early nineteenth century bakufu and han leaders propounded one or another policy for the express purpose of securing the realm against the foreign menace. Initially those policies related to the degree of rigor or concessiveness with which to handle transient intruders, and they did not suggest any fundamental contradiction between domanial and national interests. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, concern with the nation was leading to policy debates and decisions that did lay bare such contradictions. Most notably when Tokugawa Nariaki 德川斉昭, daimyo of Mito han, lobbied vigorously to develop Mito’s coastal defense capacity and asked the bakufu to

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29 The Tempō-reform period has not been thoroughly examined in English-language works, but aspects are treated in the works by Craig and Beasley cited above, and in an entry that I have written for the forthcoming Encyclopedia of Japan.
let Mito take charge of Hokkaido and fortify it against Russian advance, he evoked a sharply hostile response from bakufu leaders, who saw his proposals and undertakings as a menace to bakufu well-being. Similarly, when the bakufu had earlier (and again later) taken charge of Hokkaido at the expense of Matsumae han, the action generated intense dismay among samurai of Matsumae and even among men from other han in the northwest, who feared that defense measures against the Russians might eventually jeopardize their own domains as well.

By the 1840s, then, a rather poorly delineated sense of national ethnicity seems already to have begun functioning as an important motivating force goading people to address problems of the day. And some of these problems, such as the defense of Hokkaido noted above, served to pit national and domanial interests against one another. Domanial ethnicity may also have been felt more and more in contexts that did not juxtapose it sharply with a national sensibility but rather pitted particular domanial sensibilities against one another. For example, one can perhaps speak of a quickening of domanial ethnicity among bakufu and han administrators in the more overtly beggar-thy-neighbor policies of the Tempo reform. It is also suggested by the charges and counter-charges of factional in-fighting during the Tempo period, as for example, when rival groups within such han as Mito and Owari accused one another of being in effect traitors to their han or conversely disloyal to the shogun. In such instances the emerging notion that the well-being of one's domain was not coterminous with the well-being of all domains and of the larger system represented decay of the established value system of the bakuhan order and hence erosion of the foundations of the quiescent bi-level ethnicity.

In sum, by the 1840s one can see signs of national and domanial ethnicity emerging as active motivational factors in political behavior. On balance, however, it is probably best to say that until 1853 domestic difficulties were more widely and persistently alarming than foreign ones. They fostered lines of intra- and inter-domanial tension and activity that did not give rise to a clearly articulated domanial ethnicity and that muffled the impact of the budding sense of national awareness. In consequence the perception of a domanial-national harmony of interests and the accompanying balance among political forces that had long characterized the bakuhan system remained intact. Although it may have been under a severe, possibly destructive, level of tension, the basic assumption that a decentralized hōken system was preferable to a unified gunken system remained nearly unchallenged.

It is conceivable, of course, that domanial ethnicity was being quite generally elicited but that it has not been brought out into the open by historians because it has not seemed interesting, appearing to be but an archaic or reactionary insularism that did not deserve attention. On the other hand, if one can find no evidence of domanial concern beyond administrators, it may be more correct to explain their behavior in terms of customary bureaucratic values rather than ethnicity.
3. The Transformation of Tokugawa Ethnicity

After 1853 and the arrival of Commodore Perry’s armed squadron, the pattern of ethnicity began to change with dramatic speed. The demands made by Perry and by those who followed him during the next several years raised national ethnicity to an unprecedented level of salience and kept it there. As this thitherto quiescent sensibility became active in the context of the radically escalated foreign menace, more and more samurai became aware of the incongruence of national and domanial loyalties. The recognition that what was best for the nation was not necessarily best for either domains in general or one’s own domain in particular presented a contradiction that cut right to the heart of emotional certitude and shattered the intellectual foundation of the Tokugawa order. As the 1860s progressed and the political crisis deepened, more and more samurai abandoned the hōken ideal and turned to the gunken political pattern as an adequate alternative. The shift to the gunken ideal was facilitated by growing familiarity with Western unitary states; they seemed to be founded on gunken principles, and their success seemed to validate those principles in terms of the problems that Japanese of the 1860s saw themselves facing.31

For several reasons the process whereby the older ethnic pattern and its doctrinal formulation were destroyed was in fact vastly more difficult and complex than the above statement suggests. The first reason for difficulty was that the process entailed a transvaluation of ideals, a process that is inherently traumatic. Secondly, the process was an individual one and some samurai reoriented their thinking much more rapidly than others. Political conflicts reflecting the consequent differences in understanding were endemic, and they were bitter: those who still assumed that domanial and national well-being were indivisible and those who assumed that they could no longer be reconciled hurled savage accusations of betrayal, cowardice, and incompetence at one another. Thirdly, as men came to realize that domanial and national ethnicity did not mesh neatly, they had to choose between the two or by tortured logic deny the implications of their discovery. Whatever choice they made shaped both the objectives of their action and the means they employed. Differences of choice underlay bitter political conflict in which charges of disloyalty and dishonor were flung back and forth with hot conviction. Finally, even when men agreed on what must be done, they could still disagree deeply on who should do it and how. The question of who should do it was most commonly a matter of colliding ambitions. But the issue of how was more complex. It reflected both the group-configurations of status, domain, and nation that were discussed at the outset of the present article and the organizational characteristics of the bakuhansen system that were adumbrated in the discussion of Tokugawa ethnicity.

31 This discussion of the final years of the Tokugawa era is based on my reading of the works mentioned above and the materials that underlie my study, cited in n. 23, above, of the 1860s.
To elaborate this last point, the vertical division of society into han and its horizontal division into status groups meant that some men could participate in some types of political action while others could engage only in other types. In consequence what one person saw as a feasible mode of action would appear impractical to another. But driven by an awakened ethnicity and restricted to this or that strategy, men acted, in the process colliding with one another and thereby helping to confound one another's ventures, even when they were in essential agreement on what they were seeking to achieve. The organizational patterns, moreover, limited sharply the number of modes of action that actually had promise. Most significantly, many men saw their problems as national in scope, but Japan had no real national institutional instrument for addressing such problems. An effective national instrument had to be forged out of the resources at hand—most notably the imperial institution, the bakufu, the han, the awakened sensibilities of samurai, the cultural heritage of Japan, and the productive resources of society in general. Not surprisingly, men tried to combine these elements in many ways, and the result was a number of mutually conflicting and/or inadequate initiatives, whose implementation contributed to the confusion and disorder.

In the end, of course, men did devise effective means of achieving at least some of their objectives. But until those means were developed, the political picture was one of extraordinary complexity, a complexity that belied the rather simple but elemental and emotionally devastating/exhilarating transvaluation of ethnicity and political ideal that was occurring.

Viewed chronologically the political process of the years 1853–1868 consisted of three phases. During the years 1853–1857 the old ideals of the hōken system remained basic to political behavior and the 1830–1840s pattern of a modestly active but generally undifferentiated bi-level ethnicity persisted. From 1858 society entered a confused transitional period exhibiting the multiple complexities discussed above. Then from about 1864 the new ideals of a gunken order and simplified, differentiated forms of ethnicity, both domanial and national, began to shape major political initiatives. These changes freed more and more men to pursue their objectives, indifferent to the well-being of the old order. Civil war ensued as domain-based groups tore at one another, driven by complex and often ambiguous considerations of domain and nation, until by 1870, with the internal power struggle resolved, domanial ethnicity lost its salience and national ethnicity came to prevail.

The first period requires little elaboration. The demands of Commodore Perry in 1853–1854 provoked intense debate and heated disputes. All sorts of people, including Emperor Kōmei, great lords such as Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito and Shimazu Nariakira of Satsuma, and various politicized samurai such as Sakuma Shōzan and Yoshida Shōin, urged bakufu leaders to do this or that on behalf of the nation. It continued to be assumed, however, that domanial and national interests were compatible, and until 1857 political activists generally
took it for granted that their own domains and all groups of samurai would support the bakufu in its efforts on behalf of the nation.

From about 1857 the escalated diplomatic demands of the American consul general, Townsend Harris, and the subsequent treaties allowing trade and foreign residence began to erode the united front. The process of erosion produced political patterns complexly shaped by considerations of both status and ethnicity. It is true that the most common response at all levels was to avoid involvement. But among those who chose or were forced into involvement, high- and low-ranking men tended to behave differently. Higher-ranking men, whose immediate responsibilities were the well-being of their domains, tried to work through those domains to shape national policy. When faced with the incongruence of national and domanial interests, many did not see or chose to deny the implications of the age, insisting instead that the problem lay in the misguided and selfish policies of others. To correct those policies, domanial leaders used such diplomatic and coercive devices as they had at hand in their domanial organization. This strategy eventuated by about 1860 in a policy known by its proponents as kōbu gattai 公武合体, 'union of court nobility and samurai leadership'. As the term suggests, it was a policy of coalition that sought to secure national interests without jeopardizing domanial interests.

The kōbu gattai strategy was first undertaken in 1859 by the dictatorial bakufu leader Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼, who believed that Tokugawa Nariaki was the cause of misguided and selfish policies. Ii intended kōbu gattai to mean a cooperative solidarity of court and bakufu that could command loyal obedience of the daimyo and through them control and exploit the resources of all samurai and the entire nation. During the early sixties, however, leaders of certain great han, notably Shimazu Nariakira's successor in Satsuma, Shimazu Hisamitsu 島津久光, used the term kōbu gattai to mean a cooperative solidarity of the court and leaders of great domains. Together they would overcome the misguided and selfish policies of the bakufu by using it as an administrative structure for implementing national policies determined by great lords, senior nobles, and senior bakufu officials in consultation. This scheme, it should be noted, did propose to strip the bakufu of a hegemonial political position, but it in no way purported to threaten Tokugawa or other domanial integrity. The differences in these two definitions of kōbu gattai should not, therefore, conceal the basic character of the strategy: kōbu gattai was an attempt to meet current national needs in a way that would not jeopardize domanial interests either in principle or in terms of specific territorial autonomy. Said differently, it was an attempt to solve the problems of the day while still preserving the hōken order and the harmonious bi-level ethnicity that it had permitted.

Lesser men were unable to act through domains to shape policy because they were excluded from decision-making office. When, thinking about the problems of the day, they confronted the incongruence of national and domanial needs, many responded as did their superiors by concluding that the problem lay with
selfish and corrupt others and that their admonishment or punishment would set matters aright. Being unable to do so by use of domanial authority, however, more and more of them elected to defy domanial laws and leaders, and engage in unsanctioned (or semi-sanctioned) terrorist activities. They assassinated Ii Naosuke in 1860 and in following years attempted to assassinate others for alleged crimes against the country, attacking foreigners and menacing both bakufu and han officials. Others concluded that the problem involved inadequate institutions as well as inadequate leaders, and in 1863 they undertook to solve the crisis by carrying out an Imperial Restoration. That strategy was spoken of by its proponents as son’nō jōi 崇王攘夷, or ‘Revere the Emperor and expel the barbarian.’ As the term suggests, insofar as son’nō jōi proponents were unable to act through their domains, they had developed a strategy that disregarded those domains in order to satisfy the needs of an active and quite clearly identified national ethnicity by mobilizing the resources of the country directly under the emperor.

In practice the kōbu gattai and son’nō jōi movements overlapped, both fostering and confounding one another. In part that was so because leaders of both were predisposed to see the problems of the age at least partially in terms of selfish, misguided, or incompetent leadership by others. Moreover, leaders of both being in most cases samurai, they did originate in one domain or another and so they often had personal or feudal ties that fostered association with one another. For example, the bakufu was able to mobilize an important force of nationally conscious activists, calling them the Shinchōgumi 新撰組 and Shinsengumi 新撰組, and using them against other domanial and activist groups. Quite similarly, leaders of domains such as Tosa, Satsuma, and Chōshū found activists who would cooperate in national politics. In consequence the conceptual difference between kōbu gattai and son’nō jōi tended to be obscured by their operational entanglement.

The differences were real, however. Son’nō jōi was far more radical and embodied more fundamentally transformational implications than did kōbu gattai. Both the Restoration attempt of 1863 and much of the radical activism associated with it quite clearly threatened the hōken ideal and the whole interest structure of domanial leaders. In consequence, during 1864–1865 imperial, bakufu, and han leaders closed ranks in a temporary, semi-coordinated program of repression that by mid-1865 had destroyed the insurrectionary son’nō jōi activity. The most important political movement whose motive lay in national ethnicity and whose mode of action was shaped fundamentally by status cleavages had been suppressed.

The nationwide political crisis that had given rise to anti-establishmentarian son’nō jōi and then led to its suppression had by 1864–1865 also undermined the kōbu gattai strategy. It did so by forcing leaders of major domains, meaning the bakufu, Satsuma, Chōshū, and several others, to recognize that the needs of domain and nation could not simultaneously be met, and hence that the hōken system could not be maintained. Forced to reconceptualize the relationship of
domain and nation, they found an acceptable alternative formula in the *gunken* ideal. In this ideal, however, the relationship of the two was fundamentally changed from that of 'traditional' Tokugawa thought. The two levels of ethnicity were no longer viewed as congruent in a universalistic sense. The two were congruent, rather, only in the particularistic sense that national unity was to be achieved by the massive expansion of one's own domain's role, even though that would be done at the expense of other domains. It was a purpose fundamentally different from that of older 'beggar-thy-neighbor' policies, which had been pursued for domanial purposes with no real intention of changing the *bakuhan* order. Although one might find historical precedent for this motivational pattern in the pre-Sekigahara age, it did not constitute a perpetuation of customary Tokugawa ethnic patterns.

National politics had become inter-domanial politics, shaped not by status cleavages but by the vertical lines of feudal organization and guided, increasingly, by a vision of a reordered polity of a *gunken* sort. This simplification of the mode of action almost of necessity begot an obfuscation of motive because the mode seemed such an inadequate response to the concerns of the age. How, after all, could the interests of the nation be secured by domains going to war with one another under the very guns of ambitious foreigners? Was that not the ultimate expression of selfish ambition, in which domanial ethnicity had come to prevail at the expense of national ethnicity?

Certainly the action of the late sixties, and even much of the rhetoric, seemed to suggest that domanial ethnicity had indeed prevailed. Thus during 1864–1865 leaders in Chōshū were able to win massive support from their vassals by appealing to them to defend their domain against destruction by the bakufu. And during 1865–1867 leaders and activists in Satsuma, Wakayama, Aizu, Hikone, Karatsu, Sendai, Tosa, Uwajima, Tottori, and many other han used similar arguments about the dangers to their domain to mobilize vigorous samurai support. In the bakufu, too, more and more it was domestic enemies of the Tokugawa lord and land rather than foreign enemies of Japan that were cited as reason for patriotic military efforts and self-strengthening measures.

As these comments imply, for many followers appeals to an activated domanial ethnicity or to the older form of undifferentiated ethnicity still worked. But among leaders and would-be leaders there were many by the late sixties who were clearly aware that domains were instruments, not ends, of action. When civil wars were fought in 1866 and 1868, they were not waged merely to protect Chōshū, Satsuma, and Edo from each other. They were fought to promote national purposes, which meant ever more clearly to ever more leaders the realization of a *gunken* order that would tolerate no domanial autonomy and no domanial ethnicity within itself.

It would surely be misleading to deny the persistence of an older diffuse ethnicity—or even of a single-minded domanial ethnicity—among some leaders. And doubtless, too, the evoking of older virtues by leaders seeking to rally sup-
porters seduced many who really knew better into sliding back into the comforting emotional framework that saw the pursuit of domanial and national goals as coterminous. But history would not long permit such self-deception. With the collapse of the bakufu and the subsequent defeat of resistant han in northeast Japan in 1868, the conquerors from Satsuma and Chōshū found themselves in a situation in which domanial ethnicity was rapidly stripped of even the appearance of salience. To pursue the interests of their han simply made no sense once there ceased to be a serious anti-Sat-Chō enemy. Rather, they were in charge of the nation’s destiny, and with the foreign danger still very much alive, the national level of ethnicity asserted its primacy.

As this happened among the victors, it helped stabilize the political situation, enabling leaders and followers of other han to get their bearings and realize that the world had not ended. As 1869 and 1870 passed, considerations of domanial ethnicity, which had remained strongly evident in other han,\textsuperscript{32} began to erode, giving way to a more clearly defined national ethnicity. In some instances it was expressed in terms of support of the new regime; in others, in terms of an opposition that manifested itself through political organizations cutting across both domanial and status group lines. By the early 1870s domanial ethnicity had lost its salience, and in consequence promotion of the nation’s well-being became not only the unchallengeable driving force of the Meiji government but also the only effective platform from which challenges to the regime could be mounted.

In sum, then, to relate this interpretation more explicitly to our summation of Glazer and Moynihan, our argument suggests that the domanial and national levels of ethnicity which once had been quiescent, mostly harmonious elements in the old order mutated on behalf of interest groups encountering new adversary situations. They evolved through stages of activation, disequilibration, and disjunction, which process gave rise during the early 1860s to political action involving all three group configurations of status, domain, and nation. In the escalating crisis of the mid-sixties status as the organizing factor in action was discredited. During the latter half of the decade the two differentiated ethnic identities, both of which combined symbolic and instrumental factors, served ambiguously as active, mutually reinforcing elements propelling segments of the Japanese polity toward civil war as a partially perceived preliminary to the construction of a new national order. In Reece’s word, it was a ‘disaggregation’ preparatory to the reorganization of the polity. Following the Sat-Chō conquest, domanial ethnicity lost its salience and in the outcome the kuni, that ambiguous term of hoary Tokugawa usage, became indisputably Japan the nation.

\textsuperscript{32} Jansen, pp. 358–59, suggests the operation of this domanial ethnicity in Tosa during 1869–1870. \textit{The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa}, Hokuseido, 1934, illuminates the complexities of the time very nicely, revealing the linkages of status, domanial, and national considerations as domanial leaders tried to decide how to act.