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Tradition
Past/Present Culture
and Modern Japanese History

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Modern Japan is widely regarded as a society saturated with customs, values, and social relationships that organically link present generations of Japanese to past generations. Especially since 1945 and the eclipse of the ideology of the emperor-centered family-state, Japanese have come to know themselves, and to be known by others, through their cultural traditions. Group harmony, aversion to litigation, the martial arts, industrial paternalism: these and other "traditional" values and practices are assumed both to predate Japan's modernization and to have contributed to its unparalleled success. It was not that long ago, in fact, that Japan specialists ascribed Japan's successful modernization to the utility of its premodern values and institutions, on the assumption "traditions" were direct cultural legacies.¹

Readers will be surprised to discover the recent origins of "age-old" Japanese traditions. Examined historically, familiar emblems of Japanese culture, including treasured icons, turn out to be modern. Much of the ritual and the rules of Japan's "ancient" national sport, sumo, are twentieth-century creations. Prince Shōtoku's enshrinement as an icon of Japanese communal harmony dates from the 1930s and wartime spiritual mobilization. There is little evidence of Japanese

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cultural aversion to litigation before the twentieth century; a misnomer, the Japanese "weak legal consciousness" is largely the legacy of institutional innovations of political elites since World War I. The rhetoric of "warm-hearted" worker-management relations was invented in the 1890s by capitalists seeking to fend off government regulation. At that time labor relations on the shop floor tended to be strife-ridden and chaotic; the labor practices that today constitute "Japanese-style labor management" were introduced piecemeal decades later. Some were even borrowed from abroad.

What does it mean that so much of Japanese "tradition" is a modern invention? The essays in this volume build on the critical historical approach to tradition developed by Eric Hobsbawm and employed to startling effect by the contributors to The Invention of Tradition. The methodological breakthrough of Hobsbawm and his collaborators was to historicize modern British and British colonial traditions and thereby reveal the ideological and constructed nature of modern tradition—an aspect of tradition scholars had only dimly perceived.

Social scientists have conventionally used tradition in two overlapping and somewhat contradictory senses. First, tradition designates a temporal frame (with no clear beginning), which marks off the historical period preceding modernity. Used in this way tradition aggregates and homogenizes premodern culture and posits a historical past against which the modern human condition can be measured. Thus Anthony Giddens contrasts the pervasive condition of "radical doubt" institutionalized by modernity with the "ontological security" and "moral bindingness" of life in traditional society, where kinship, religion, custom, and ceremony impart feelings of belonging. Used in this way tradition is discontinuous with, and stands in opposition to, modernity.

Tradition in the second and more frequent usage represents a continuous cultural transmission in the form of discrete cultural practices of "the past" that remain vital in the present. In Edward Shils's formulation, tradition is "far more than the statistically frequent reoccurrence over a succession of generations of similar beliefs, practices, institutions, and works." The core of tradition is strongly normative; the intention (and the effect) is to reproduce patterns of culture. Shils writes, "It is this normative transmission which links the generations of the dead with the generations of the living." In this conception, rather than representing culture left behind in the transition to modernity, tradition is what modernity requires to prevent society from flying apart.

Both conceptions of tradition are resolutely ahistorical, reproducing the linked binaries of premodern/modern and stasis/change central to the Western conception of modernity that achieved a kind of apotheosis in post–World War II

modernization theory. Yet scholars who would reject out of hand the notion of timeless culture and a static past have often failed to problematize the historicity of tradition, for the normative status and repetitive practice of invented traditions powerfully naturalize them. Thus the provocative title of Hobsbawm’s volume, and especially the lead essay by Hugh Trevor-Roper debunking the Scottish highland tradition, served as a wake-up call. The timing was just right. The broad movement across the humanities to deconstruct culture had just been launched, and Hobsbawm’s ironic representation of tradition as invention made an important fact unmistakably clear: tradition is not the sum of actual past practices that have perdured into the present; rather, tradition is as a modern trope, a prescriptive representation of socially desirable (or sometimes undesirable) institutions and ideas thought to have been handed down from generation to generation.

The choice of the subtitle of this project, “Invented Traditions of Modern Japan,” explicitly acknowledges our intellectual debt to the conceptual model developed in Hobsbawm and Ranger, which mandates skepticism with regard to the historical claims of tradition. Nevertheless, a word of caution is in order. “The invention of tradition,” rather like the now-ubiquitous concept of “imagined communities,” is both the title of a well-known book whose thesis broke new intellectual ground and a mobile and elastic concept, captured in a seductive title phrase, which has been adopted, used, and criticized, sometimes without close attention to the specificity of the original concept. Because the contributors to this volume both borrow from and revise Hobsbawm’s conception of the invention of tradition, a short sketch of its salient features is useful.

In the introduction to The Invention of Tradition, Hobsbawm lays out a rigorous sociological definition of tradition (practically identical to Shils’s) in which invariance is the salient characteristic. Hobsbawm does this in order to distinguish invented tradition, which he identifies with superstructural institutions and elites, from custom, which he conceives as popular and capable of being mobilized by groups at society’s base. Drawing out the contrast, Hobsbawm argues that while traditions impose fixed practices, custom is flexible, capable of accommodating a certain amount of innovation while still providing the sanction of “precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history.” Accordingly, in a world


7. See also Jennifer Robertson, “It Takes a Village: Internationalization and Nostalgia in Postwar Japan,” in this volume.

marked by constant change, the invention of tradition functions "to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant." Finally, invented traditions are distinguished from other (genuine?) traditions by the fact that continuity with a historical past "is largely fictitious."³

A frequent criticism of the concept of the invention of tradition is that all traditions are (and always have been) socially constructed, and hence in some sense invented. The invention of tradition, in this view, at best restates something everyone should already know, and at worst improperly denies the possibility of authentic tradition by collapsing the distinction between (legitimate) agency and artifice. A second and related criticism of the model arises from the dichotomy drawn between tradition and custom. Tradition, unlike custom, is said to be rigid—and must be so since the intent, Hobsbawm insists, is to represent some part of modern life as unchanging. Speaking from the theoretical position of postcolonial studies, Dipesh Chakrabarty raises an important epistemological issue in the Afterword related to the attribution of invariance in Hobsbawm's model. The point I will pursue is different: the conspicuous disjuncture between the rhetorical aspect of tradition represented in the claim to invariance, and the continually shifting substantive aspect, which is institutionalized in practices and texts that are reorganized and reformulated over brief spans of time without apparent forfeiture of authority. This observation leads to a third and final criticism. The elite/popular typologizing of tradition/custom is useful only up to a point, especially when applied to cultural, rather than to political, traditions. It is true, of course, that most traditions are instituted and regulated by elites; in fact, it is exactly this feature that makes their study so revealing of how discourse is constituted in relation to social power in specific historical contexts. But even when elites make tradition "just as they please," the practices and ideas they authorize have a tendency to take on a life of their own. Traditions, like customs, are embedded in larger social structures that are continuously reshaped by the very forces of change endemic in capitalist modernity that they aim to arrest.⁴

Each of these points warrants further discussion, both to develop a better understanding of the uses and misuses of the invention of tradition, and to indicate with reference to specific cases how the concept is deployed by the contributors to this volume. I began by noting the common criticism of the invention of tradition, which is also the most sweeping, that the concept itself is theoretically naïve since everyone should know by now that culture is socially constructed. What if anything, then, is gained by conjoining invention with tradition?

³. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, Invention, 2. Hobsbawm is interested in the appearance of new or newly configured cultural practices that claim, or are accorded, the status of traditions. He does not develop criteria to differentiate "invented" from other traditions.

The criticism misses the point. The primary value of the invention of tradition to the critical study of culture is heuristic rather than theoretical; it raises new and important historical questions concerning the formation of culture, even if it does not in the end produce criteria capable of sustaining a new, or rigorous, typology. Even if one were to assume (which would be foolish) common knowledge of the comparatively recent origins of most modern traditions, establishing the fact of their invention is only the first step. The significant findings will be historical and contextual. How, by whom, under what circumstances, and to what social and political effect are certain practices and ideas formulated, institutionalized, and propagated as tradition? Take, for example, the Japanese tradition of “weak legal consciousness,” which is the subject of Frank Upham’s essay.\(^1\) It is instructive (perhaps even startling) to learn, as Upham argues in the first part of the essay, that before the modern era Japanese apparently demonstrated little cultural aversion to litigation as a means of resolving conflicts. More instructive, though, is his account of the historical process through which Japanese political elites produced what, after the fact, became the tradition of weak legal consciousness. Finally, he offers an analysis of the larger implications of successful invention. The political decision to channel dispute resolution away from courts, Upham argues, imposed on subsequent generations a “choice” of legal cultures, whose primary effect has been to restrict the latitude and initiative, not only of citizens as private actors but also of the judiciary, in the implementation of legislation, while increasing those of the bureaucracy and the executive branches of government.

There are potential pitfalls inherent in the problematic of the invention of tradition, however. When “invention” is narrowly construed as artifice, the possibility of a legitimate exercise of agency is erased, leaving only manipulation and mystification. Quite apart from producing boring history, such a reading entails real political costs. As Arif Dirlik recently noted in relation to the history making of indigenous peoples, a theoretical position that ignores the social conditions of the production and reception of invented traditions (and other tropes of identification) denies to marginal and oppressed populations legitimate recourse to the authority of the past in their ongoing struggle to fashion counterhegemonic cultural identities.\(^2\) Though not as forcefully as Dirlik, Marilyn Ivy also expresses reservations in the introduction to her study of popular traditions of Japan’s Tōno region with “the now common critique” that all tradition is invention. Ivy makes an important point: “To say that all tradition is invented is still to rely upon a choice between invention and authenticity, between fiction and reality, between discourse and history.”\(^3\)

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1. Kawashima Takeyoshi introduced the phrase “weak legal consciousness” to characterize the presumed long-standing cultural aversion of Japanese to the formal legal processes. See Frank Upham, “Weak Legal Consciousness as Invented Tradition,” in this volume.


The essays in this volume take account of the double meaning of “invention,” which the dictionary tells us signifies both imagination and contrivance, creation and deception. Every tradition trades between these two poles; and if traditions are to retain their vitality under changing historical conditions, one can expect to find constant shifting and overlapping of signifying positions. Traditions of any duration are diastrophic rather than flat and unified; hence they function as multivalent and somewhat unstable cultural signifiers.

This aspect of the invention of tradition, which is not sufficiently recognized, is well illustrated in Itô Kimio’s discussion of one of Japan’s most celebrated traditions, wa no seisshin (“the spirit of peace and harmony”). Wa, one hears repeatedly tirelessly, has regulated Japanese community life since the misty beginnings of Japanese civilization. The injunction “Harmony is to be valued” is indeed recorded in the first article of Prince Shōtoku’s “Seventeen-Article Constitution,” a foundational document dating to the seventh century. But as Itô shows, this famous precept has traversed a circuitous path in arriving at the present “traditional” meaning. Looking at shifts of meaning in the modern period alone, one sees that in Meiji (1868–1912) wa no seisshin signified the ethical basis of the state and prescribed a hierarchical social order. Under the pressure of wartime mobilization in the 1930s and during the Pacific War, wa, Itô argues, first came to signify communal unity, as in the ubiquitous slogan “All People, One Mind.” However, it was only in the radically altered political, social, and economic conditions of the postwar era that wa no seisshin acquired its current meaning of cooperation among equals. Finally, as marvelously illustrated by the spatial ordering of the employees’ faces in a bank’s New Year’s greeting card from the era of high economic growth (see fig. 1) the earlier hierarchical meanings of wa have not been completely erased but are partially retained in the spatial order.

It is not hard to explain why, despite the strong rhetorical claim to represent unchanging culture, the signifying functions of traditions turn out to be anything but invariant over time. Like other modern institutions, traditions are shaped by everything from capitalist markets to technological innovation in the ongoing process of incorporating and reorganizing new knowledge and information that Anthony Giddens usefully characterizes as “institutional reflexivity.” Formalized and strongly ideological, traditions are not, of course, as plastic as commodities of mass consumer capitalism. Adjustments are likely to be “sticky” rather than continuous and may provoke moments of resistance. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to differentiate tradition from custom solely on the basis of degree of substantive rigidity. Both appear to be remarkably flexible.

15. Giddens, Modernity, 2.
The puzzle posed by modern traditions is the disjuncture between the rhetorical posture of invariance—the strong claim at the heart of every tradition to represent “time-honored” beliefs and practices—and their actual historicity. Why is it that startlingly recent origins, frequent “tailor[ing] and embellish[ing],”16 and even shifting signifying functions, do not, as a rule, impair traditions’ authenticity and authority? The essays in this volume reveal, but do not address, this paradox, which is deeply implicated in the related but separate problematic of public memory. Nevertheless, promoted by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s well-warranted criticism of the neglect of affect, it is worth reconsidering, as one relevant example, the invented tradition of the yokozuna, the highest rank in sumo.

As Lee A. Thompson notes, authoritative histories of sumo date the origin of the yokozuna system to November 1789, when two wrestlers were allowed to perform a ring-entering ceremony wearing a white rope around the waist. This privilege continues today. Thompson argues, however, that the modern yokozuna is very much the product of the tournament champion system—a twentieth-century innovation that placed new emphasis on objective and quantifiable measures of sumo wrestlers’ performance. Today the criteria for appointment to yokozuna rank, and the expectations for performance once promoted, bear faint resemblance to those of the historic institution. New rules have been added and a good deal of the ritual is new, including the archaizing gestures of the referee’s costume and the Shinto-style roof suspended over the wrestling ring, which frame the spectacle. In less than a century the substantive aspect of the yokozuna tradition has been transformed. Nevertheless, the fact of slim continuity with the original practice has not undermined the status of the yokozuna as a powerful signifier of this “ancient” and uniquely Japanese tradition of physical prowess. Hence, the prospect of an American-born sumo wrestler meeting the existing requirements for promotion to yokozuna precipitated a moment of cultural crisis, which, Thompson argues, led to a tortured reformulating of the criteria for promotion.

The case of the yokozuna lends force to Chakrabarty’s critical reminder—which applies to all of the essays—of the importance “of smelling, tasting and touching, of seeing and hearing,” the sensory dimension of cultural practices such as traditions. Noting that “ideas acquire materiality through the history of bodily practices, they work not simply because they persuade through their logic,” Chakrabarty warns against reducing memory to “the simple and conscious mental act. The past is embodied through a long process of the training of the senses.” The yokozuna provides a particularly striking reminder of the importance of the performative aspect of invented traditions. Substantive continuity with the historic institution of the yokozuna may be slender. But the dignified ring-entering ceremony

repeated each day at the opening of the senior division matches provides the audience with a convincing sensory spectacle of continuity with an “age-old” past.

The third point to be discussed in relation to invention of tradition is the complicated relationship of modern traditions to social power. Most (though not all) traditions are produced by elites, and some are consciously fashioned as instruments of control. This process is quite clear in the political sphere. In Japan as throughout the industrialized world, the rise of the nation-state in the late nineteenth century produced an outpouring of new national symbols and rites such as flags, anthems, and holidays, as well as new (e.g., public health) or reorganized (e.g., armed forces) state institutions that created and imposed their own discourses of social control. The idea of “the nation,” after all, stands as the mega-invented tradition of the modern era.

The essays in this volume examine developments in the cultural sphere. Here, too, one finds new traditions that served hegemonic interests. Several of these have already been introduced in other contexts. Perhaps the clearest example, however, is provided in Andrew Gordon’s discussion of the tradition of Japanese-style management. In the 1890s industrialists opposed to factory legislation, Gordon pointedly observes, had to concoct the neologism onjō-shugi (“warm-heartedness”) to give a name to the purportedly timeless Japanese custom of benevolent workshop relationships. Yet examination of even this clear-cut case of invention soon produces a complicated picture. Gordon’s discussion, which does not stop with the fact of the invention at the turn of the century but follows its progress down to the bubble economy of the late 1980s, reveals sharp swings at the level of discourse. Not once but twice, managers’ passionate insistence on preserving Japan’s “beautiful customs” of workplace cooperation and harmony rapidly dissipated when it appeared that greater economic advantage was to be had by adopting Western models. Still, during the periods when onjō-shugi was out of favor, industrial elites were not able to remake the workplace; to a large degree, management was constrained by the normative, as well as the institutional, inertia of the discourse of Japanese-style management it had initiated.17

Inoue Shun’s discussion of the modern martial arts tradition shows how easily the inventors of traditions lose control of their progeny. Kanō Jigorō, the founder of Kōdōkan judo on which the twentieth-century martial arts tradition is modeled, was an unapologetic rationalist committed to modernizing the techniques, mode of instruction, philosophy, and organization of the Tokugawa-era martial arts. A patriot, Kanō was not a narrow nationalist or a social conservative; he opened the Kōdōkan to women and worked hard to make judo an international sport. Yet with the rise of militarism in the 1930s and the ascendency of a xenophobic ethos of Japanese exceptionalism, the idea of the martial arts Kanō had

pioneered was reinvented by ultranationalists and promoted as a counterweight to Western values, with the express purpose of infusing Japan’s burgeoning modern, and largely Western, sports culture with “Japanese spirit.”

Up to this point I have primarily addressed conceptual issues related to the use of invention of tradition as a historical problematic with the aim of revising, and perhaps extending, the original model. Here my emphasis shifts from the model to several larger historical themes that emerge from the essays in this volume. The appearance and trajectories of new traditions are “important symptoms and therefore indicators” of larger social developments. Constitutive of modern cultural formation, they also mirror modern society’s anxieties, fissures, and ruptures. The discussion that follows is organized around two themes: the relationship of invented traditions to social conflict and to national identity.

Capitalism drives the production of new cultural practices, just as the nation-state mobilizes the production of modern political traditions. In Japan the beginnings of industrial capitalism can be dated to the last decade of the nineteenth century, consumer capitalism to the decade following World War I. The discourses of tradition analyzed in this volume are infused with anxiety over new, more sharply delineated and disturbing social divisions. Tenant militancy, rural impoverishment, industrial strikes, sprawling urban slums, periodic violent protests (culminating in the massive rice riots that swept through 368 cities, towns, and villages in the summer of 1918); these and other signs that capitalism was remaking the social landscape in new and frightening ways fueled deep apprehensions. Not surprisingly, new traditions attempted to contain these social divisions by imagining a society made whole.

One such discourse was the invented tradition of kyōdōtai, Japanese village community, whose origins Irwin Scheiner locates in the mid-nineteenth century and the development of capitalistic social relations in villages. Following the opening of major ports to unrestricted trade in 1859, a development that greatly stimulated farm by-employments and rural manufacture, villages increasingly became polarized between the poor (insecure wage-laborers and small holders) and the wealthy (rural manufactures, middlemen, moneylenders, and landlords). But the phenomenon of yonaoshi (world renewal) uprisings, Scheiner suggests, cannot be adequately grasped by Sasaki Junnosuke’s influential theory of the revolutionary struggle of the “semi-proletariat.” Scheiner argues, rather, that it should be seen as the attempt by the new rural poor to renegotiate the village, via “world renewal,” as a community in which norms of mutuality and unity are enforced.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the transition to industrial capitalism increasingly accentuated the disparity between the rural and urban sectors and, at the same time, sharpened class divisions within both. The unevenness of capitalist development produced two overlapping but distinct discourses, which addressed

18. Hobsbawm and Ranger, Invention, 12.
(and refigured) the rural/urban divide: agrarianism (nōhōnshugi) and native ethnology (minzokugaku). Both reified the difference between country and city—though to quite different ends. Louise Young’s essay on the still-born tradition of Manchurian colonization and my essay on the radical agrarianism of the Ibaragi Aikyōkai examine the bureaucratic and popular streams of agrarianism in the tumultuous interwar period. The former emanated from the highest levels of the bureaucracy and the latter from village-level activism bitterly critical of the central government, but both imagined the Japanese farm village as (the only) social space within Japan’s capitalist modernity capable of transcending class divisions.

While to agrarianists of all stripes the relative poverty of the village was a sign of backwardness, a deplorable social condition that impelled spiritual and political mobilization, Yanagita Kunio and the native ethnology movement he founded celebrated cultural unevenness. As discussed in the essays of Hashimoto Mitsu and H. D. Harootunian, Yanagita reacted to the social indeterminacy of capitalist modernization by constructing an imaginary folk (jōmin) and space (chihō) free of social division. Hashimoto argues that Yanagita, unable to go back in time to recover a unified “Japan,” rendered the diachronic dimension of culture synchronically as center/periphery, thereby creating a space where the “true” Japan lived on. In Harootunian’s striking formulation, Yanagita, Orikuchi Shinobu, and legions of followers “searched out practices they believed predated modernity and constructed an imaginary folk, complete, coherent, and unchanging in lives governed by immutable custom.” Many scholars read Yanagita as a critic of capitalist modernity, which in some sense he was. But Harootunian’s analysis shows that despite a rhetorical opposition, native ethnology actually worked to stabilize capitalism by offering the appearance of an alternative to capitalist modernity.

Strenuous denial by capitalists of conflict in Japan’s new factories was, of course, the principal impetus to the invention of the discourse (and later the practice) of Japanese-style management. But anxiety over class also appeared in other, more unlikely places. Jordan Sand’s analysis of the invention of “home” in the late Meiji period primarily revolves around the gendering of domestic space but also reveals the insecurity of Japan’s nascent middle class hemmed in by the masses of new urban poor on one side, and on the other by the still culturally influential aristocracy of birth. The discourse and architectural practices that promoted the new progressive ideal of the intimate conjugal family (which quite quickly became established as “traditional”) was part of a broader effort to make middle-class values normative of “Japan.” Thus, one such reformer at the turn of the century insisted, against all evidence, that Japan was “65 percent middle class.”

The second theme that emerges with great clarity is the role of new traditions in the formation of Japanese national identity. Japan specialists, at least, now recognize that below the level of the politically active samurai and wealthy peasant classes (and even here one must speak in qualified terms), Japan did not enter the
modern era with a strong or unified sense of national identity.\textsuperscript{19} Despite a comparatively high degree of common ethnicity, language, material culture, and religious practice, in Japan no less than in the newly formed nation-states of Europe and America, a sense of “being Japanese” developed after, rather than before, the building of the modern state. Following the first phase of economic, social, and cultural modernization, which ended in the late 1880s, the oligarchy launched a broad effort to push the imperial institution to the forefront of the people’s consciousness. Drafted at the highest levels of government, such celebrated texts as the Preamble to the 1889 Meiji Constitution and the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education made unbroken dynastic succession the cornerstone of the family-state ideology. Their success, Carol Gluck has shown, is partly explained by the fact that provincial officials and local notables played a key role in interpreting and disseminating the “modern myths” of a continuous emperor-centered polity.\textsuperscript{20} More recently, Takashi Fujitani has expanded our understanding of the mechanisms of imperial myth making by focusing on “material vehicles of meaning” such as national ceremonies, holidays, emblems, and monuments, which created “a memory of an emperor-centered national past that, ironically, . . . had never been known.”\textsuperscript{21} Fujitani extends his analysis to “a torrent of policies” regulating everything from hair styles to hygiene, which “aimed at bringing the common people into a highly disciplined national community and a unified and totalizing culture.”\textsuperscript{22}

Yet it is important to remember that instilling a consciousness of being imperial subjects was only part of the process of (mis)using history to create a cohesive Japanese identity. The process involved—in fact it required—the wide circulation of common practices that claimed to represent continuous and stable culture. In other words, “tradition” contributed to the formation of national identity though the ideological function of collapsing time and reifying space. Troping new or newly configured cultural practices as tradition removed these practices from historical time. They were read back into the undifferentiated time of “the Japanese past,” to be recuperated not merely as values and practices that had withstood the test of time, but as signs of a distinct and unified Japanese culture.

\textsuperscript{19} Marilyn Ivy, citing Naoki Sakai, \textit{Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Discourse} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), writes, “It is arguable that there was no discursively unified notion of the ‘Japanese’ before the eighteenth century, and that the articulation of a unified Japanese ethnics with the ‘nation’ to produce ‘Japanese culture’ is entirely modern” (\textit{Discourses, 4}). Mariiko Tamanoi notes that Western theorists of the nation-state such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner tend to assume Japan’s ethnic and cultural homogeneity prior to modernization (\textit{Politics and Poetics of Rural Women in Modern Japan: Making of a National Subject} [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998]).


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
I am not suggesting that the historical past played no role in the formation of modern Japanese identity. None of the “traditional” cultural practices we have discussed was cut from whole cloth; rather, as in the case of the invention of the modern emperor system, cultural traditions were fashioned from both material and discursive antecedents. Even in the clearest cases of instrumental and self-interested invention—that is, the discourse of industrial paternalism—the capitalists who coined the neologism onjō-shugi did not invent the concept of onjō, an old and celebrated norm whose prescriptive meaning was widely understood.23 The point, rather, is that cultural traditions are “chosen,” not inherited.24 Fabrication enters when the rhetoric of Japanese “tradition” functions to deny the historicity of cultural production; when it authorizes communalism and cultural particularism while obscuring the “strategic” character of the process through which the past enters the present.25

Yanagita Kunio’s native ethnology is not only an immensely influential tradition in its own right, as demonstrated by its followers. As Hashimoto Mitsuru shows, Yanagita invented the tradition of Japanese tradition by claiming that Japan’s preservation of its original culture made Japan unique among modern nations. Countries of the West, Yanagita argued, were disconnected from their past; in Japan, however, tradition lived on in the latent but ubiquitous world of the “abiding folk.” Citing James George Frazer’s classic study The Golden Bough, Yanagita boasted that only in Japan, where traditional culture lived on, was it possible to have “nation-specific folklore studies” (ikkoku minzokugaku).26

Like the invention of the “abiding folk,” Yanagita’s remarkable assertion that Japan alone had achieved modernity without cutting itself off from its original culture has meaning only as the assertion of an ideological position. Nevertheless, it draws attention to the specificity of the historical conditions of Japanese modernity. Unlike most of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, Japan was never colonized; infringement on Japanese sovereignty through the “unequal treaty system” was largely limited to the commercial sphere. Its retention of sovereignty, in turn, accelerated political, social, and economic modernization, creating the material basis for new forms of cultural production, including “tradition,” which appeared only after modernization was well under way. More directly, sovereignty ensured that Japanese elites (rather than colonial administrators) did the inventing. The result: in Japan the invention of tradition furthered the national project of modernization. Here Japan presents a striking contrast with India, where “the British were... implicated in the production of those very components of Indian tradition that have in postcolonial times been seen as the principal impediments to full-

24. The very useful concept of “choosing a tradition” is taken from Upham, “Weak Legal Consciousness.”
scale modernity.” Simply put, Itō Hirobumi, the principal architect of Japan’s modernization project in the latter part of the nineteenth century, enjoyed a luxury denied to Jawaharlal Nehru more than a half century later. Nehru, because of the powerful, prior Orientalizing of precolonial Indian culture by the British, had to find evidence of modernity in Indian tradition; for example, he went to pains to argue the “scientific temper and approach” of Indian thought. Itō, Andrew Barshay tellingly observes, had the freedom to look upon Japan’s “feudal” legacy as an “enormous historical opportunity” for promoting, for example, “the bond between patron and protégé” in Japan’s modern factories.

The strategic use of tradition did in fact further the state’s modernization project. The discourses of “the spirit of peace and harmony” and industrial benevolence are only the most obvious examples, but there were others. Karen Wigen analyzes the forging of a shared, primordial “Shinano” identity among residents of the newly drawn prefecture of Nagano. The invention of regional identities in Meiji, she suggests, played a critical role in extracting financial sacrifices from prefectural residents by giving them an affective stake in the progress of their prefecture.

It is sobering to discover how broadly the notion of Japan’s particularity was shared. It invaded, and partially disarmed, even oppositional discourse. Andrew Barshay’s analysis of prewar Marxist historiography shows how Yamada Moritārō’s seminal text, Nihon shihonzugai bunseki (Analysis of Japanese capitalism) (1934), inadvertently participated in the discourse of a unique Japanese modernity. Outraged by the social costs and imperialist agenda of the forced march to “national wealth and power,” Yamada hinged his analysis of Japanese capitalism on “semi-feudal” land tenure in Japan’s villages and the “serf-like” regime of workers in Japan’s dual-structure manufacturing sector. Yamada’s text, Barshay argues, forged “an iron link” between discourses of Japanese particularism and historical backwardness whose influence extended far beyond Marxist circles. On this point, at least, the Marxists converged with Japanese-style management: both asserted that capitalism in Japan was sui generis because the core consisted of premodern values and social relations. By constructing tradition at the heart of Japanese capitalism, the preeminent sign of modernity, Yamada unwittingly joined his intellectual enemies in fashioning the myth that capitalism in Japan wasn’t really capitalism after all because of the strength of Japan’s tradition. Despite enormous intellectual achievement and moral passion, Barshay concludes, Yamada’s analysis “missed the invented—and strategic—character of the process” through which “tradition” entered the present.

28. Ibid., 27
29. Barshay, “Doubly Cruel.” It should be pointed out that Marxism was obviously anything but normative in the prewar period. But in the postwar period the Kōza school of historical economics wielded great influence, at least until the 1970s, in intellectual circles, in the labor movement, and within the left political parties. In this sense, one can speak of Yamada as having invented a tradition.
Traditions, I noted early on, are normative and establish themselves through repetition. Two essays on gendered cultural practices of the prewar period suggest that tradition is amenable to reform but not to radical change. Jordan Sand analyzes the new gendering of domestic urban space initiated in the late Meiji period by social reformers and middle-class professionals. Focusing equally on architecture and ideology, Sand traces the evolution of the concept of katei, a neologism for home / home life, from its origins in nineteenth-century Japanese Protestant reformers’ moral criticism of “feudal” family life, to the point where it became a societal norm. A great deal had to be invented: for example, architectural innovations such as the interior corridor (nakaroka), which divided interior residential space into separate spheres, and the short-legged dining table (chabudai) which introduced the common dining table into the Japanese house and made it possible for the family to eat together. While conservative state ideologues wrote the patriarchal family into the Meiji Civil Code, a more democratic, affect-centered family prevailed in the redesigning of actual living space. What became the iconic (and today nostalgic) image of the “traditional” Japanese family—consanguine members seated on tatami and gathered around the chabudai to share tea or a meal—in fact originated in turn-of-the-century discourses of architectural and social reform, which drew heavily from the West.

In the decade following World War I, Japanese capitalism entered a new stage, characterized by the explosive growth of modern media technologies, mass marketing of items of personal consumption, and new forms of entertainment and pleasure seeking. The stylish moda (modern girl) of the 1920s represented bourgeois women’s challenge to established gender norms. As Miriam Silverberg argues, the cafe, where rural and urban lower class young women sought employment as waitresses, created a narrow but new social space for the renegotiation of gender relations. But while the cafe and the cafe waitress drew from a long history of female sex workers in food service occupations, the social indeterminacy of the cafe waitress, whose role allowed seduction to go both ways, posed too radical a challenge to gender norms. First restricted, and finally prohibited, in the period of wartime mobilization, the culture of the cafe and cafe waitress, Silverberg claims, died out. It never became a tradition.

In Jennifer Robertson’s critical analysis, contemporary furusato-zukuri (native place-making) represents more than a nostalgia for rootedness and wholesome living associated with the farm village. Robertson argues that the affective pull of furusato-zukuri, especially to the males who engineer these projects, resides in the equation of furusato with mother, as illustrated in the quite amazing statement of the director of the 1983 movie Furusato: “Furusato is the ancestral land [sokoku]. My/our [waga] ancestral land is Japan, it is Gifu prefecture, it is Saigō village, it is the village’s subsection [aza] . . ., it is [my] household, it is mother.” This association, Robertson suggests, points to the recuperative aspect of native place-making in the paternalistic attempt to reconstruct an authentic, ontologically secure representation of stable gender relations in the much less certain present.

I noted that tradition is used in two distinct, though overlapping senses: on the one hand, “the past” against which the modern is measured and on the other,
specific cultural practices believed to represent cultural continuity. The Edo period (1600–1867), Carol Gluck argues, has functioned since early Meiji as the invented past in relation to which Japan’s modernity defined itself. Identified as “tradition,” Edo was to Meiji Japan what the ancien régime was to revolutionary France: a historical imaginary that evoked the past to get to the future. The original invention of Edo occurred in the late nineteenth century, when commentators conceived the national project in terms of a telos of progress on an East-West axis and made Edo the obverse of the Meiji vision. They mapped Edo using tropes like feudalism, the cultural and economic energies of commoner society, the era of great peace, and sakoku, “a closed country.” Depending on the vision of modernity, images of Edo sometimes affirmed and sometimes opposed the direction of the Meiji state. Whatever the initial political and social valence of the tropes, they constituted an allegedly indigenous tradition. In every case, from the anti-Edo of the fascist 1930s to the rose-colored Edo of the postmodern 1980s, the period is constructed as the mirror image of a particular modern future.

A final point concerns the ideological modalities of the invention of tradition. One of the interesting issues that Chakrabarty raises in his Afterword concerns the tropes of temporality and affect. Addressing the articles on Yanagita Kunio by H. D. Harootunian and Hashimoto Mitsuru, he distinguishes two modes of temporality in Yanagita’s writing: “nostalgic” and “epiphanic.” The nostalgic mode corresponds to the familiar sense of belatedness in invented traditions, the ideological construction of a past that must be recovered by adherence to practices of quite recent origin. However, the epiphanic mode rejects the figure of loss and recovery. It escapes from historical time and constructs a vision of eternity, a “modern nationalist epiphany” produced by a performative agency resistant to state institutions. Citing the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, and carefully noting that “the shadows of both capitalism and the nation-state fall much more heavily and lengthily on our discussion of Japanese history” than in South Asian studies, Chakrabarty argues against the notion that the romantic/aesthetic nationalism leads inexorably to statist and jingoist fascism.

Certainly not everywhere at all times, and probably not again in Japan. The changes in domestic and world political economy since the Pacific War have been epochal, and historical coordinates are always decisive. The evidence of the essays in this volume is sobering, however. In the 1930s and during the Pacific War only Marxism, with all its modernist baggage, held its ground as an oppositional discourse. Judo, harmony, industrial paternalism, folklore studies, “home”: these and the other new cultural practices of the prewar period either actively collaborated with militarism and imperialism or were severely compromised by not resisting. The subject of my essay, the populist strain of agrarianism, is illustrative in this respect. I characterize the social imagination of Tachibana Kōzaburō and Aikyōkai as romantic and utopian—epiphanic, in Chakrabarty’s formulation. In its populist phase—that is, prior to Tachibana involvement in the Incident of May 15, 1932—the rhetoric of the Aikyōkai was neither nostalgic nor jingoistic, suggesting that utopia posits new social relations in imaginary political space. But