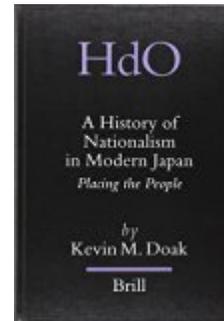


Kevin M. Doak. *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan: Placing the People*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. xii, 292 S. \$93.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15598-5.

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Placing the People or Practicing Nationalism?

“Much of what is written about Japanese nationalism is not really about nationalism at all” (p. 1). So claims the very first sentence of Kevin M. Doak’s treatment of Japanese nationalism, thereby making explicit the book’s agenda. It is a work that, by its very design and targets of analytical assault, raises crucial methodological concerns about how nationalism should be dissected. The book analyzes what are for Doak key conceptual building blocks of Japanese nationalism: emperor, society, civic nation, and ethnic nation.

The book under review is part of a recent surge of interest in Japanese nationalism that challenges earlier views, such as Asaba Michiaki, *Nashonarizumu: meichō de tadoru nihon shisō nyūmon* (2004); Kayama Rie, *Puchi nashonarizumu shōkōgun: wakamono-tachi no nipponshugi* (2002); and Itō Kimiharu, *Yanagita Kunio to bunka nashonarizumu* (2002). Recent works in English include Curtis A. Gayle, *Marxist History and Postwar Japanese Nationalism* (2003); Brian J. McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity* (2004); Naoko Shimazu, ed., *Nationalisms in Japan* (2006); and Sandra Wilson, ed., *Nation and Nationalism in Japan* (2002).

In this highly readable and meticulously researched work, Doak provides the basic intellectual background of the incarnations of Japanese nationalism. He examines the origins of nationalist concepts in Europe, but points out that the Japanese did not merely reproduce foreign conceptualizations but refined them for: the construction of a multi-ethnic empire, the demands of wartime mobilization, and post-imperial reconstruction. He stresses

that Japanese has two basic ways to express “nation,” and by extension, “nationalism”: *minzoku* and *kokumin*, and that *kokkashugi*, though translated as nationalism, is better rendered as “statism.” Whether due to an idiosyncrasy of English (in which “nationalism” must be prefixed by an adjective denoting which type of nation-ness it designates) or careless media treatments, “the people” and the polity are often conflated by foreign observers.

In chapter 2, “The Preconditions of Japanese Nationalism” Doak explains the notion of “the people” (the defining notion in most studies of nationalism), though this idea was expressed in various ways during Meiji: *okuchō*, *shūsho*, *sōsei*, *banmin*, *jimmin*. In his warning about anachronistic readings of how Japan transitioned from a premodern feudalistic system to a modern centralized polity, Doak notes that Japanese nationalism was not solely created by the state, capitalism, Western imperialism, the emperor, or “the people.” After all, Meiji was a fluid betwixt-and-between period; there was nothing inevitable about how the Japanese state and its relation to its subjects came about. Doak also notes the significance of “public consultation” (*kōgi yoron*) and “public discussion” (*kōron*) and their relation to “rewarding talent” (*jinsai tōyō*).

Specifically, Doak examines the role of French legal theory and republican nationalism and writes that “before even the constitutional sense of national identity (*kokumin*) was defined, let alone a sense of the Japanese people as an ‘ethnic nation’ (*minzoku*), such a legally defined sense of the Japanese as a constitutional,

democratic nation was still possible” (p. 67). Relevant here is Mitsukuri Rinshô (the so-called Montesquieu of Japan) and the legal theory of *minken* (“people’s rights”). Eventually, however, Germanic state-centered theories pushed aside French legal thought, resulting in popular movements that opposed the state. This “radicalization of the people” led to a populist nationalism articulated more concretely in ethnic nationalism (a collectivistic and culturalist-organic definition of “the people”).

Monarchical nationalism is explored in chapter 3, and here Doak notes that Japanese nationalism is unusual in its intimate connection to monarchy. This is related to the key role of the *tennô* during the Second World War and “from the very weakness of true nationalism in modern Japan” (p. 83). The political elite rejected republican nationalism in favor of the monarchy as the legitimate principle for unifying the people. The emperor, part of the *kokutai* (“national essence”) which in this context designates an unbroken lineage of monarchs, was elevated above political bickering, while the government (*seitai*) handled rough-and-tumble partisan competition. His role, though, was contested: was he a Confucian patriarchal monarch (e.g., Motoda Eifû), a more secular constitutional monarch (e.g., Inoue Kowashi), or the embodiment of Shintoist mythology? Such contestations determined whether “the people” related to the monarch as “subjects” or “citizens.”

The tension between nationalism and imperialism was reflected in understandings of the emperor. On one hand he was a Shintoist “ethnic tribal chieftain” and therefore, theoretically at least, incompatible with imperialist expansion. On the other hand he was an emperor with sovereignty over a culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse collection of peoples. In actual practice a compromise was reached: the emperor maintained Shintoist ethno-religiosity by privileging the Japanese *minzoku* within an imperial polity. This conciliation concerns a significant change in terminology: Japanese monarchs were called *kôtei* (a monarch on par with other monarchs). However, in the 1930s the Japanese monarch became *tennô* (a uniquely Japanese ruler). This shift “represented a last ditch effort to reconcile imperial monarchy with nationalism in the interests of national unity in a time of war” (p. 113).

“Society” (*shakai*), a concept we now take for granted, is the topic of chapter 4. However, its introduction as a social-scientific analytic and critique of the status quo destabilized late nineteenth-century industrialized societies. Society, after all, is an autonomous grouping of in-

stitutions and individuals distinct from premodern hierarchies. There was nothing self-evident about “society,” and Doak lists the initial Japanese glosses of this term (though the original translations did not fully capture the meaning of the modern concept).

Early on *shakai* became associated with reform and building a more egalitarian social system by flattening (at least relatively) the hierarchical feudalistic order. Indeed, usages of society reflected a divide between the elitist state and critiques of the political order from among the masses. From the point of view of the authorities, society itself became a “problem,” while others conceptualized society as a stand-in for “the people.” Significantly, “theories of society functioned as surrogates for aspirations to nationhood” (p. 143). The usage of *shakai* as a substitute for national identity continued into the post-imperial period, resulting in a protest culture of anti-statism rather than a civil society.

Chapter 5 investigates *kokumin* and civic nationalism (*kokuminshugi*), which at an abstract level, has been in competition with ethnic nationalism. But usages of *kokumin* were not unambiguous, and it is important to recognize that during the imperial period *kokumin* lacked legal, constitutional, and official recognition. Nevertheless, *kokumin* was used to integrate the people into the state while protecting the monarchy’s sovereignty. Under the postwar constitution, the nation was formally reconstructed as a *kokumin*. Nevertheless, the distinction between opposition to the state versus social autonomy from the state has been lost, thereby compromising Japan’s civil society. The section beginning on p. 184, “Meiji Kokumin Theology,” affords particularly interesting material. Doak explores how Christian thinkers, rather than wanting to build a wall between church and state or establish a theocracy, attempted to “negotiate their faith with membership in an emerging state” (p. 184).

The contested concept of *minzoku* is investigated in chapter 6. Its present usage emerged around the First World War, at a time when calls for “one nation, one state” and the “right to self-determination” began to bring down multi-ethnic polities (e.g., the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires). *Minzoku* partnered up with elements from both the right and left, indicating a certain political promiscuity. On the latter side of the political spectrum, socialists and Marxists adopted the ethnic nation as an antidote to the capitalist state. Confronting the Japanese leadership was a choice: was Japan a homogeneous ethnic national state or was the Japanese *minzoku*

flexible enough to incorporate foreign *minzoku* into the imperial project? Eventually, the imperial state envisioned a hierarchy of *minzoku* with the Japanese on top. During Japan's postwar period some replaced the civic polity with a romanticized *minzoku*. It is worthwhile commenting on how Doak conceives the state, since he is troubled, rightly so, by its conflation with the nation. Doak notes that his book lacks a chapter on the state as a way to precisely counter the "nationalist assumption that nationalism is always intertwined" with the state. "More political histories of Japan should follow [Charles] Tilly's lead and decide whether they will focus on the state or the nation, not confuse the two in an effort to do both simultaneously" (p. 9).[1]

Certainly good reasons exist for distinguishing the state from the nation, but to insist on such surgical conceptual detachment of two intimately interrelated notions strikes this reviewer as rash. After all, while some nationalists have reasons for conflating state and nation, other nationalists, with different agendas, have reasons for separating the two. Though Doak does not ignore how the state and nation "intersected and collided" in Japanese history, his premise is that these two abstractions can be effectively studied separately. However, states and nations interact in complex and subtle ways and cannot be so easily teased apart. Granted, agenda-driven politicians or under-informed journalists may confuse the two, but most researchers judiciously acknowledge the distinction. Doak notes that Japanese nationalism was not a "crystallization" around a state (p. 45), but of course this is true in most places; the point is to explain how state and nation implicate each other, not cavalierly divorce them. The book claims to be a history of Japanese nationalism, but its treatment is truncated, more or less ending in 1945. Since this is more an analysis of what elites have claimed about Japanese nationalism than of the actual sociopolitical practices constituting nationalism, it is better described as an intellectual history. This approach raises a methodological issue: does nationalism garner its visceral staying power from what a restricted number of thinkers and leaders claim in publications, that though popularly read, are still relatively limited in consumption? Or is it driven and directed by the social tectonics of daily life? Is nationalism a product of concrete practices or theoretical disputations? This question is often phrased in the formal/explicit versus informal/implicit understanding of nationalism. Doak is obviously most comfortable with the former approach, and so we must wonder how much is left out of the analysis. After all, more than just the products of mere debates,

nationalism emerges from concrete practices, deeply implicated in (though by no means determined by) the vast array of activities that form the fabric of daily life.[2] The attempt to circumscribe nationalism results in certain types of nationalism not being treated. For example, missing is any mention of economic nationalism, surely one of the most crucial types of nationalism in post-imperial Japan. In the last chapter Doak characterizes his work as a "handbook" that identifies the "basic elements" of Japanese nationalism (p. 265). Certainly the key building blocks (i.e., *minzoku*, *kokumin*, *shakai*, and *tennô*) need to be acknowledged to appreciate present-day controversies. Relying on rarefied debates of intellectuals, however, leaves a rather abstract impression of the issues. Doak's book is an *intellectual* historical interpretation. It is not clear, then, if the distinctions that Japanese thinkers made between ethnic and civic nationalism were as significant or clear-cut among the average Japanese. Abstractions can lead to some curious conclusions. For example, he highlights the technical absence of the Japanese state during the occupation (pp. 33, 204). However, in order to understand resurgent postwar nationalism, the suspension of *formal* political structures strikes this reader as inconsequential. Perhaps an over reliance on very broad concepts also explains why Doak is impressed with Prime Minister Abe Shinzô's advocacy of "healthy nationalism" and his use of *kokumin* for nation rather than *minzoku*. Abe's "nationalism is founded on civic values and patriotic sensibilities that place the nation in an ethnic-free context that emphasizes individual freedom" (p. 271). Politicians everywhere deal in propaganda, but Japanese leaders are particularly well known for trafficking in slogans and catchphrases for domestic consumption and naïve foreign observers. We can obtain a clearer picture of Abe's intentions by examining his actual policies, not his platitudes. Doak is to be commended for his heavy reliance on Japanese sources and careful exploration of the subtleties of the actual idiom used by early Japanese thinkers. Some of the individuals Doak brings to light are not well known outside Japan. Whatever one may think of Japan's attempts at grappling with modern identity, after reading Doak's book one is left with a profound appreciation for the complexity of the issues. His work underscores how concepts central to our current and comfortable understandings of modern politics are not essentialist and require a process of stabilization. His book is also useful for appreciating what is happening now in Japan, as journalistic accounts point to the supposed "resurgence" of Japanese nationalism.

Notes

[1]. Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975). [2]. See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

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