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Plots and Motives in Japan's Meiji Restoration

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> The French Revolution as commonly conceived never took place.
> ————Claude Lévi-Strauss

Like other dramatic and discontinuous historical processes, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 possesses the inherent fascination to sustain yet another rehearsal of its basic course of events. The present one differs from others in several ways. It does not center on samurai heroes and villains contesting foreign incursion. Instead it identifies fully four groups that acted during the late Tokugawa era, the years 1850–68, known by the generic periodizing word *bakumatsu*—"the end of the bakufu," that is, of the shogun's government situated at Edo. It presents each group according to the experiences and motives of its members. It points to the interactions between the four narrative structures, the plots or *mythoi,* but without homogenizing them into a unitary historiographical line. It also recognizes the necessary prefiguration of the historian's field but tries nevertheless to convey the perceived intentions of the four groups of historical actors.

Using the last decade of the bakumatsu period as an example of an historic watershed, this essay thus sketches a novel method for appreciating the onset of large-scale political and social change. The basis of the method lies in establishing the four *mythoi* and then narrating these plots or story lines that historical agents and agencies (human beings and social institutions) experienced during the final years of Tokugawa bakufu control over Japan. Long-lived as it was, lasting from 1600 to 1868, the Tokugawa era retained its synchronic unity for some two centuries after the system was fixed. But the period ended with Japan in profound disarray. It is that ending to which we will turn our attention.

Bakumatsu Japan is known for its confusions. A cacophony of voices expressed differing perceptions of the world. These voices proposed actions emanating from a multitude of motivations. Real people, of course, do not live "stories." They live in the here and now and generally make the best of it. But historians must construct narratives that make sense of the random data

handed along from the past, data that represent something of the aspirations of historical actors. The point of this article is to emphasize the differential roles of interacting groups on the eve of the Meiji Restoration.

In a passage remarkable for capturing the surface contradictions of a time of confusion, George Sansom observes that during the bakumatsu period "a fantastic ethos prevails throughout the land." He continues with a catalogue of the seeming paradoxes that puzzle the retrospective analyst who wants to understand the era:

The domestic politics of this period were described by more than one contemporary writer in works with such titles as *Yumemonogatari,* or *Story of a Dream.* That, though not so intended, was a fitting description of the plots and counterplots, the quarrels and arguments, the confusion between names and things, the misunderstandings and bewilderments which characterize this uneasy epoch. It is full of episodes that seem not to belong to waking life, but have the plausible inconsequence, the unearthly logic, of events in a dream.[1]

If what Sansom means by all this is that he and others have encountered difficulty in comprehending the course of events between the arrival of the American Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 and the Meiji Restoration of 1868, then he is surely right. As the bakufu approached what was to be the end of its time in power, the historian looking backward finds it troublesome to formulate a coherent narrative. The chronology gets "hot," as Claude Lévi-Strauss would say, because stunning and memorable events follow one after another with dizzying speed.[2]

The various ideas comprising the collective ethos of the Japanese who lived at the time are hard to summarize, harder to analyze, and harder still to compress into a single orderly system. Victor Turner has persuasively characterized periods such as this as "liminal,"[3] pointing out that reason and logic rarely govern what happens in major historical transitions. More often, myth works its way to the fore, appealing to the psychological need for stability and deep-seated truth—a truth more compelling than the superficial facts of existence, which themselves may well be transitory—shared by elites and masses alike. "Myths treat of origins but derive from transitions," Turner writes. "Myths relate how one state of affairs became another . . . how chaos became cosmos."[4] And myths reassure people when events threaten the viability of the social or political order, for myth promises recurrence, the return of fundamental virtues and heroic action.

No liminal period in world history is more rife with myth and the quest for redemption than bakumatsu Japan. There are numberless accounts of what

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[1] G. B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 281.
[2] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 259.
[3] Victor W. Turner, "Myth and Symbol," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan-Free Press, 1968), X, 576.
[4] *Ibid.*

happened, concurring in skeletal outline of facts and events but not in what those facts and events mean. Although the chronology is not in serious doubt, there are many schools of interpretation, several of them blooming while others wither, but none convincing enough to close the books. Social scientists disagree about the "revolutionary" character of the Meiji Restoration. Writers who judge the Restoration a failure, or simply deem it defective, usually deny that it constituted a revolution. Others who applaud the experiments of the Restoration leaders take refuge in a thesis that the revolution may have been made from above, by an oligarchy, yet it did do wonders for Japan and therefore deserves high praise.[5]

A working historian confronted with the multitude of versions of how the bakumatsu period proceeded and the Meiji Restoration came to occur must despair about what any retrospective investigator can really know. Whether we can draw any valid conclusions at all is a challenging question, and the issue may turn into one of faith or of ideology. The facts are there, but how they are strung together is what produces an interpretation. An attempt to present "just the facts" will fall short of a coherent interpretation and disappoint even the most rudimentary survey in a history course. In recent years the social science models developed by Western scholars and the economic determinism that has prevailed among the Japanese have added a wealth of information about events and situations but have only muddied the issue of what the Meiji Restoration finally signifies.

The search for another way to comprehend the bakumatsu years and the Restoration tends to draw the historian back to first principles, or, quite literally, to the principals themselves—the actors who took part in the dramas of bakumatsu Japan. R. G. Collingwood points the way by defining the objective thus: the historian must remember, Collingwood writes, that an action is "the unity of the outside and inside of an event," that is, of its exterior happenings and movements and its interior "thought"; therefore the historian's "main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent."[6] And Kenneth Burke cautions readers that those who would understand human motivation must bear in mind "a pentad of key terms": act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose.[7] In short the intent in this

[5] For paradigmatic examples in English of these opposing appraisals of the Meiji Restoration, see Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), ch. 5; and John Whitney Hall, *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), chs 11–14. In English, the most comprehensive treatment of Japan during the mid-nineteenth century is that of W. G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972). But see also the meticulous study of the bakufu's last years by Conrad D. Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980).

[6] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 213.

[7] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), xv–xvi.

essay is to go back and reconstruct the history of bakumatsu Japan according to the perceptions and purposes of the ''agents''—the groups of actors who participated in the stories that go with the era.

But this formulation raises the question, how many dramas? The Greeks, and H. W. Fowler, would forever remind us that no drama can have more than a single protagonist.[8] Yet the necessarily simultaneous occurrence of many histories within the larger history of bakumatsu Japan allows us license to speak of several protagonists, several dramas. By a further leap into the arbitrary realm of assigning literary plots to the aspirations of historical actors, we may try to characterize the kind of story that each group lived through. The trick is to limit the number of groups we treat in such a way as to be able to construct a coherent combined narrative.

It is a commonplace that people must make sense of events by construing them in story form. ''We tell ourselves stories in order to live,'' observes Joan Didion. ''We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely . . . by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.''[9] The people of bakumatsu Japan were obliged to make sense of their life situations if for no other reason than the very novelty of much of what they faced. Excited and confused, their lives altered by forces that were inscrutable to them, they experienced different stories depending on the attitudes and goals they brought to their rapidly changing world. And no one of these groups experienced the same Meiji Restoration as any other. Different motives and perceptions yielded different results, ranging from defeat and frustration to success and jubilation. Lévi-Strauss, referring to another period that has always been viewed as liminal, puts the point boldly:

When one proposes to write a history of the French Revolution one knows (or ought to know) that it cannot, simultaneously and under the same heading, be that of the Jacobin and that of the aristocrat. *Ex hypothesi,* their respective totalizations . . . are equally true. One must therefore . . . give up the attempt to find in history a totalization of the set of partial totalizations; or alternatively one must recognize them all as equally real: but only to discover that the French Revolution as commonly conceived never took place.[10]

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[8] H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 470–71.

[9] Joan Didion, *The White Album* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 11.

[10] Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind,* 258. Lévi-Strauss regards perceived and recorded history as a batch of ''fraudulent outlines'' whose only peculiar characteristic is chronology, i.e., the temporal order or sequence in which events occur (pp. 258–62). ''Dates may not be the whole of history . . . but they are its *sine qua non,* for history's entire originality and distinctive nature lie in apprehending the relation between *before* and *after,* which would perforce dissolve if its terms could not . . . be dated.'' Therefore no history of the French Revolution can give an accurate impression of what happened, but only a chronologically correct (yet contextually truncated) account of events (p. 258).

So it was also with the Meiji Restoration. Many restorations occurred, not just one, despite the fact that we routinely speak of "The Restoration" as if it were a uniform process.

Most people have written the history of the Restoration from the standpoint of the winners, those hardy dreamers who lived out their passionate ambitions imbued with myths about Japan and its destiny.[11] But the winners were not alone in living so close to myth. Turner has written that by its nature "liminality is . . . a period of structural impoverishment and symbolic enrichment" when people take stock of their cultural inventory and seize upon myths that relate to life crises and milieus outside of normal rules and regulations.[12] For such a period, then, I propose to focus on four sets of actors—four protagonists—who lived four separate story lines that require four kinds of orientation toward the world with four different ideological outlooks.[13] To be sure, this scheme excludes some groups, and it also lumps individuals into groups for purposes of clarity. But the dangers in conducting this exercise are minimal compared to the advantage of being able to look at the Restoration through the lenses of a defined set of groups of actors.

A full elaboration of this method would yield an extended exercise in "thick description," a phrase Clifford Geertz borrowed from Gilbert Ryle in order to characterize the sort of ethnography that exposes the multiple layers of meaning of behavior when it is seen in its cultural context.[14] But this article will be descriptively lean rather than thick, because its object is to concentrate on the method, not on the content, of the historical period in question.

By the terms of this method, the protagonists of the several dramas on the eve of the Meiji Restoration divide neatly into four groups: (1) the Western envoys and traders, (2) the bakufu and its allies, even when they disagreed, so that this one group perforce includes both the imperial court and the chief feudal lords, or *daimyo,* (3) the followers of popular millennial and other "religious" movements, and (4) the men who called themselves imperial loyalists, who finally did "seize the jewel" that was the Meiji emperor and made the Restoration in his name. Adapting from Northrop Frye, it can be argued that the foreigners sought reconciliation—on their own terms, of course—and lived the story line of comedy. Not that theirs was a funny story; it just turned out right, from their standpoint, because it reintegrated a disordered Japan and made it possible to resume stable trade relations. The other

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[11] Totman, of course, is an exception to the general tendency to write the history of the winners. His *Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu* chronicles the dismal if enlightening human tragedy that befell the managers of the Tokugawa system despite their best intentions and efforts.

[12] Turner, "Myth and Symbol," 576–77.

[13] The quaternary scheme presented here derives from Hayden V. White's 1973 article, "Interpretation in History," in his *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51–80.

[14] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6–10.

narrative forms or story lines are those of irony on the part of the bakufu and leading daimyo, of tragedy for the popular movements that were suppressed or redirected after the Restoration, and of romance or adventure for the self-proclaimed patriots who quested after and finally found the grail that betokened success.[15]

Now, these four agents, or groups of historical actors, perceived and explained their own actions and intentions very differently, in conformity with their disparate views of the scene in which they acted and with the discrete purposes that animated them. This is not a formal psychological judgment, but one based on simple cognition and perception.[16] Geertz might say that their world views conflicted, that the four groups of actors construed sheer reality in quite different and incompatible ways.[17] To hold that they saw reality in either (1) an integrated manner or (2) a dispersed manner gives us an analytical handle for comparing the four groups. The use of integration and dispersion as opposed tendencies among the groups can be summarized thus:

Western envoys	Integrative
Bakufu and daimyo	Dispersive
Popular revivalists	Integrative
Imperial loyalists	Dispersive

All four groups of actors sought the unity of Japan and the restoration of stability, but any particular group's basic cognitive attitude toward social action was either "integrative" or "dispersive" depending on whether that group saw its fundamental welfare residing in the ethnic collectivity of Japan or simply in itself.[18]

Western envoys who came to Japan as representatives of their governments knew that the Japanese were no match militarily for the force of arms and technological sophistication that then characterized the European nations and the United States. Yet the Japanese seemed an uncommonly volatile lot,

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[15] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 158–239; for a succinct statement of the four "narrative categories of literature" as "generic plots" or *mythoi,* see page 162.

[16] The definitions of *cognition* and *perception* are at issue here, but I am using them in a nontechnical manner outside the field of professional psychology. Both cognition and perception signify awareness or discernment as well as the process by which someone becomes aware or discerning; knowledge and its acquisition are involved.

[17] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures,* 89–90, 126–27. In his formulation of the complementary concepts of ethos and world view, Geertz defines ethos as "the tone, character, and quality of . . . life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood"; he defines world view as a people's "picture of the way things in sheer reality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society" (p. 127).

[18] For an elaboration of this typology of explanatory strategies, see Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), ch. 7. Integrative world hypotheses, writes Pepper, are inadequate in scope, whereas dispersive ones are inadequately precise (pp. 142–46).

forever subject to shifts of mood despite their demure and polite external behavior. The traders who followed the envoys when the commercial treaties went into effect felt much the same way.

What these foreigners wanted was the ability to deal with Japan unfettered by concern about personal security or the ramifications of internal Japanese political disturbances. Theirs was the start of a mission of deliverance: the best of them—the American consul, Townsend Harris; the English minister, Harry Parkes; or the French minister, Léon Roches—hoped that the Japanese government could be induced to bring the country into the community of civilized nations and end the "barbarism" of ancient ways, which heretofore had kept Japan in feudal bondage. Ethnocentrists to the core, they encountered nothing in Japan to jolt their faith in civilization and progress. They wondered how the Japanese would ever be qualified to pursue these twin muses of nineteenth-century Western social gospel.

When in 1853 the officials of the Tokugawa bakufu had looked with disfavor on Commodore Perry's assertion that Japan must abandon its long seclusion, he threatened them with the possibility of the destruction of Edo, which held a large and vulnerable population of more than a million. Perry's return in 1854 resulted in the hurried signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa, binding Japan and the United States in ties of mutual "amity and friendship."

Later Western dealings with Japan also featured heavy reliance on persuasion by force. In 1862 several samurai serving the daimyo of the Satsuma domain murdered an English merchant named Richardson. The British punished Satsuma with a naval bombardment of its capital, Kagoshima, the following summer.[19] Four Western powers—the United States, Britain, France, and the Netherlands—sent a joint flotilla to the domain of Chōshū in the summer of 1864. This naval force bombarded the port city of Shimonoseki to punish Chōshū authorities who had given orders to fire on Western shipping in a vain effort to "repel the barbarians" after the imperial court at Kyoto had proclaimed 25 June 1863 as the date when foreign trade must cease and all foreigners leave Japan.

Parkes and Roches took to forging alliances rather than bombarding ports as the military strategy of choice for treating with the Japanese. Roches made overtures to the Tokugawa bakufu; France even loaned money to the Edo government for military improvements.[20] The British hedged but gradually cast their lot with Satsuma and Chōshū, the two southwestern feudal domains that finally ended the bakufu's dominion over Japanese foreign and domestic policies. The outcome was probably unchanged by this foreign intervention,

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[19] On the Richardson affair and its aftermath, see Beasley, *Meiji Restoration*, 183, 199–200.
[20] The French *démarche* toward the bakufu is covered in English by Meron Medzini, *French Policy in Japan during the Closing Years of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, no. 41 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1971), chs 8–15.

though no one should doubt its importance: the Westerners made themselves felt.

By displaying their military superiority over their Japanese hosts, the foreigners not only underscored their presence but also tipped their hand. Whether French or English, pro- or anti-bakufu, the Westerners considered Japan a small piece in the puzzle of the world's balance of power. The games they played were ideologically conservative in the extreme, and no wonder: their purpose was always to protect their own advantage. To assure themselves of success, they needed to preserve the status quo. As France saw it, this meant bakufu hegemony over Japan. Through British eyes the restoration of stability could better be accomplished by new leaders—but stability was the coin of the realm for all the foreigners. A Japan in chaos was an impossible market into which to export and sell foreign goods.

On this point—the protection of stability—the Westerners agreed with the officials of the Tokugawa bakufu and most of the major daimyo until 1866. Both the foreigners and the Japanese leaders approached events from a standpoint of situational congruence: they could live with the status quo if only they could revive it.[21] However they might tamper, neither the foreigners nor the bakufu and daimyo wanted to forgo Japan's essential stability.

While the Westerners were intent on securing Japan as a trading partner under duress, the Japanese authorities worried more about internal stability and its requisite political underpinning. Bakufu officials and leading daimyo shared a common concern with the status quo, and they made policies meant to maintain it. An occasional maverick like Ii Naosuke, lord of Hikone and grand councillor of the bakufu from 1858 until his assassination in 1860, aimed to turn back the clock and restore a status quo ante that had become too hard to defend. The point here, though, is that all Japanese leaders favored the existing political configuration. Their notion of situational congruence varied in details from domain to domain, and within the chambers and councils of the bakufu where lesser officials ambitious for power concocted schemes for maximizing the bakufu's authority. But situational congruence was still to be its own reward, a fitting objective for politicians to pursue, and a fully sanctioned one in a Confucian hierarchical political order.

It is true that some Japanese leaders did strive to change the political system, and this very disposition toward change sets them apart from the foreigners, who were anxious not to disturb the status quo any more than necessary to perpetuate their trade advantage. Bakufu and domain officials played opposing forces off one another in order to disperse threats and resolve

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[21] On situational congruence and situational transcendence as incompatible attitudes toward existing social reality, see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge,* Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, trans. (1936; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, n.d.), 192–204.

disputes through subsumption of the conflicting parties into the over-all con-text. The more they worked at this strategy, the harder it became to keep things in any kind of order. The best of these Japanese officials were what we might call "liberal" because of their desire to spread benefits and authority, thereby co-opting potential opponents into an effective consensus with the bakufu still at its head. Abe Masahiro had tried this tack while he was chief councillor of the bakufu from 1845 to 1855, and his successor, Hotta Mas-ayoshi, followed the same line until Ii Naosuke forcibly intervened in mid-1858. After Ii's death at the hands of samurai whose lords he had treated harshly during his so-called Ansei Purge of 1858–59, new bakufu leaders resumed the strategy of temporizing, consulting, and inviting both court and daimyo to join new tactical arrangements that begged the question of full-scale systemic reform.

The geniuses of this "liberal" approach were Tokugawa Yoshinobu and Matsudaira Shungaku, who were the lords of Hitotsubashi and Fukui and direct relatives of the main shogunal line. During 1857–58 they combined to build a small alliance of influential daimyo and bakufu and court officials who tried to secure the shogunal succession for Tokugawa Yoshinobu. When Ii Naosuke's purge blocked this strategem, they awaited another opportunity. It came in 1862. As advisers extraordinaire they attempted simultaneously to rebuild feudal morale and to strengthen the bakufu. By ending the feudal obligation of alternate attendance that forced the daimyo to shuttle between Edo and their own domains, they saved money for the fiscally pressed daimyo at home; but their plan backfired as Edo turned into a partially depopulated city beset by economic depression, which led to an unsuccessful attempt to reinstitute alternate attendance. By January of 1867, however, Tokugawa Yoshinobu did become shogun and began to work with ambitious middle-level officials to maintain the bakufu's supremacy while somehow acknowl-edging the daimyo's claims of feudal autonomy. The height of this policy was reached in the fall of 1867. The bakufu announced *taisei hōkan,* a decision to return governing power to the imperial court. According to this plan, the shogun would step down and join all the feudal lords in a new participatory political system based on a council that would "advise" the imperial court on actual policy formulation. And the Tokugawa house would remain at the apex of wealth with its landholdings undiminished despite the political change.

This conciliar scheme might have worked if Satsuma and Chōshū, acting through the court on 3 January 1868, had not forcibly restored imperial rule on their own very different, imperial loyalist terms. But in a fickle age liberal reformers are always ripe candidates for an unhappy end. Ample resources and a political culture favorably disposed to compromise are the sine qua non of liberal politics, and bakumatsu Japan was running short of both. Beset by external troubles, and pressed to adopt sometimes contradictory domestic policies, the bakufu and those daimyo who cooperated with it confronted a

problem whose only cure appeared to be the use of force. The liberals did not want to compel their detractors to support the status quo, yet they were quite willing to divide and conquer: they would discriminate against feudal lords who were recalcitrant, even though the ultimate support of all the daimyo was necessary for the success of the liberal line. Against heavy odds the liberals made a valiant effort, though it was one they might as well have given up as hopeless. The problem is nicely demonstrated by a statement attributed to Tokugawa Yoshinobu in 1863, when the British crisis with Satsuma over Richardson's murder reached a climax. Nothing can happen, he wrote to the Council of Elders, that will help the bakufu. If hostilities break out between Satsuma and Britain, "victory for the English would be a disgrace for the country, victory for Satsuma a blow to the Bakufu's prestige."[22]

Nothing could illustrate the liberal dilemma more plainly. Because the feudal domains were outside the bakufu, the bakufu could not punish Satsuma for the killing of the hapless Richardson. But because Satsuma was a part of Japan, Japan as a whole could only lose if Satsuma were injured by the British, and Japan's loss was necessarily also the bakufu's. For the bakufu was *primus inter pares,* first among equals in a feudal order and the source of authority to which all foreigners looked as they tried to wrench Japan into the international system they were erecting all around the world.

The same dilemma became more acute later when the bakufu twice tried to punish Chōshū because it practiced radical policies that infuriated some foreigners and some Japanese, but most of all because these policies threatened bakufu authority. First in 1864 in response to the imperial court's wishes, then again in 1866, the bakufu mobilized troops and mounted punitive expeditions against Chōshū. In 1866 the bakufu forces were repulsed, to the very great embarrassment of the whole political system, which depended on ultimate bakufu military supremacy within Japan. Yet far from calming the fears of other domains, this pair of assaults on Chōshū sparked the far greater fear among the daimyo that if the bakufu had dared to move against Chōshū, it might soon attempt to make their own feudal autonomy an anachronism. Satsuma therefore came to rethink its traditional cosy relationship with the bakufu; in 1866 it decided to make common cause with Chōshū in a secret new alliance whose existence eventually made possible the coup d'état of 3 January 1868—the Meiji Restoration in its classic form. All the complexities of this political situation were well understood by the bakufu, whose officials possessed the greatest familiarity with the outside world and had even established schools and offices for analyzing the sources of Western military, political, and economic strength. But the 1860s in Japan were to witness a massive outburst of simplistic yet powerful emotional distress at the condition of the country. And this outburst was finally directed against the bakufu, despite its wealth of knowledge and information.

[22] Quoted in Beasley, *Meiji Restoration,* 256.

The great simplifiers had taken the field. It was a time when many complex truths would be ignored in favor of noble motives and heroic deeds. As William Thompson has said of the Irish revolutionaries of 1916, "the agents must be great simplifiers if they are to rise to the purity of heart that is to hate one thing";[23] or, we might add, to *love* one thing, such as the cause of imperial loyalism in Japan. But simplification was not confined to the samurai elites or to purely partisan politics.

The common people of course constituted the bulk of Japan's population of some thirty-five million, and as an undifferentiated mass they came to stand on grounds just as situationally transcendent as those of the most dedicated anti-bakufu imperial loyalist samurai. But the common people are not properly described as an undifferentiated mass. Many millions felt little or nothing in direct response to the troubled times. Their lives continued more or less without change. Other millions, however, searched for new ways to cope with the perverse present, for novel behaviors that might afford the hope of a better future.

Some of these millions created or were persuaded to adopt new religious convictions. Roads filled with pilgrims mark this period as well as certain earlier decades, but the pilgrimages of the 1860s—to sites such as the Sun Goddess Amaterasu's Grand Shrine at Ise in central Japan—were redolent with the anxieties of a population in flux. It was a time when new sects came into being, old faiths were abandoned, and all sorts of movements burst into flower. Uncertain people look for answers in untraditional conduct, and bakumatsu Japan was a laboratory for popular pessimism, fear, and fervent hopes. It was a time of *yonaoshi,* a millennial urge to "remake the world." World renewal movements varied from farmer and townsman rebellions to the fanatical pursuit of new or refurbished deities. Religious sects like Tenrikyō began to claim thousands of adherents. Carnivals often accompanied the pilgrimages. By the latter half of 1867, after two years of bad harvests were followed by an improvement, a carnival atmosphere pervaded the streets of Japan's major cities in the form of the *ee ja nai ka* ("right on!") commotions that coincided with the political events attending the death of the bakufu and the proclamation of a restored emperor as ruler over all Japan.

Let us take just the example of one sect, Tenrikyō, which the Japanese religious historian Murakami Shigeyoshi calls "the representative entity among popular religions established during the bakumatsu and Restoration period."[24] Founded in 1838 by Nakayama Miki, wife of a prosperous merchant-farmer in a central Japanese village located between the metropolises of Osaka and Kyoto, Tenrikyō stressed "heavenly wisdom" (*tenri*) as embodied

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[23] William Irwin Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 242.

[24] Murakami Shigeyoshi, *Kindai minshū shūkyō shi no kenkyū,* rev. ed. (Tokyo: Hōzōkan, 1963), 91.

in a benevolent creator god, Tenri Ōnomikoto. A happy family life, ameliora-
tion of financial woes, and community togetherness became hallmarks of the
new sect. Nakayama Miki, who had found her calling in the midst of a faith-
healing episode, was the earthly mediator between man and Tenri Ōnomiko-
to. In its monotheism, its founding by a charismatic personality, its appeal to
the rural poor and impoverished urbanites, its emphasis on family and indi-
vidual irrespective of sex or social status, its message of universal salvation
through faith, and even its eschatological anticipation of the achievement of a
millenarian *yonaoshi* in this world, Tenrikyō differed profoundly from the
existing Buddhist sects as well as from the Confucian ideological orientation
of the samurai elites.[25] Thousands of pilgrims descended on the new town of
Tenri that eventually sprang up around Nakayama's rural home, and that
location itself became Tenrikyō's so-called *jiba* (place of places), the font of
creation where mankind and this world as we know it were supposed to have
originated.

No sensible estimate can be made of the number of followers that Tenrikyō
ultimately attracted, but contemporary and retrospective commentators agree
that the community of the faithful was rapidly enhanced during the mid-
1860s. Not only did the new religion promise a millennial change for the
better here on earth, it also aided its community in the interim by providing
loans and jobs to many who were hard hit by the economic difficulties of
bakumatsu Japan. The sect served as a kind of credit union and employment
security agency for its neediest converts. Some of the new religious move-
ments were first known as *kō* or *kōsha*, terms denoting a mutual financial
association for community benefit.[26] Tenrikyō thus attended to both spiritual
and mundane requirements among its faithful, and the religion grew as did the
ranks of the poor and needy.

Nakayama Miki is thought to have welcomed the Meiji Restoration as the
advent of the millennium.[27] She had witnessed *okagemairi*, "pilgrimages of
thanksgiving," through central Japan ever since the massive migration to Ise
that occurred in 1830.[28] The carnivals that came along in late 1867, with their
common catch phrase, "*ee ja nai ka*," struck Nakayama as portents of the
millennium.[29] Yet the fate of Tenrikyō, its foundress, and its followers, while
hardly tragic in the literal sense, was pathetic indeed compared to their expec-
tations. The new government after 1868 turned on Tenrikyō with special
vigor, sapped its foundress's hope of heaven on earth, and eventually regis-

[25] Murakami Shigeyoshi, "Bakumatsu ishin ki no minshū shūkyō ni tsuite," in *Minshū shūkyō no shisō*, Murakami Shigeyoshi and Yasumaru Yoshio, eds., Vol. 67 of *Nihon shisō taikei* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1971), 568–69.

[26] *Ibid.*, 565.

[27] Murakami, *Kindai minshū shūkyō shi no kenkyū*, 124–25.

[28] Kishimoto Hideo, ed., *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era*, John F. Howes, trans. (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1956), 329.

[29] *Ibid.*, 332.

tered the sect as an unorthodox variant of Shinto, a status it did not escape until the era of religious freedom that followed World War II.[30] The triumph and the millennium had failed. And Tenrikyō was never the only target. All the mass religious movements were viewed with disfavor by the Meiji government in Tokyo (the new name for Edo). So were mass movements of people for any purpose, whether religious, such as the pilgrimages, or economic, as with the rural uprisings, or social in nature.

Ee ja nai ka celebrations in the cities also wound down after the new government came to power in January of 1868.[31] This strange antinomian phenomenon, in which the urban masses flouted prevailing mores and expressed contempt for existing institutions of law and order, appeared late in the summer of 1867 and totally ceased by the following spring. The celebrations, often likened to spontaneous carnivals, began near Nagoya, then spread from Yokohama and Edo in the east through Kyoto, Osaka, and Hiroshima in the west, right across Japan's widest belt of urban population density. The carnivals started when pieces of paper bearing the names of Shinto deities (*ofuda*) fell out of the sky on surprised—and ''charmed''—downtown urban populaces. Launched by persons unknown, these religious talismans were distributed far too widely and spontaneously to have resulted from a political plot, even though the city crowds clearly favored the anti-bakufu forces over the representatives of the old order.[32] The recipients of these tokens of good fortune from on high quickly got together to hold parties, feasts for relatives and friends, and above all dancing and singing orgies that ran on through day and night and clogged the central districts of major Japanese cities.

''*Ee ja nai ka*'' is the phrase that concluded every verse of the improvised songs to which the merrymakers danced. Usually without political meaning, these verses were occasionally directed against usurious rice and saké merchants or others whom the crowds disliked. Sometimes a verse castigated the foreigners, whose economic intervention had disrupted many local commercial routines in the port cities where overseas trade was beginning. But normally, the phrase ''*ee ja nai ka*'' was just a linking stanza, a means of assuring the crowd that the jollity of the moment would continue as new songs were sung and more fun would be had by one and all.

Students of *ee ja nai ka* acknowledge its importance in perpetuating the mood of *yonaoshi* yearning that marked the pilgrimages, the rise of new religions, and the bitter rural and urban riots of the middle 1860s. Itō Tadao,

[30] Joseph Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 221, and n. 85.

[31] For *ee ja nai ka* in general, see Takagi Shunsuke, *Ee ja nai ka* (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1979).

[32] *Ibid.*, 210–13. I know of no postwar historian who regards *ee ja nai ka* as the result of a conspiracy. While the prewar scholar Tsuchiya Takao in 1931 called *ee ja nai ka* ''the nonsense in Restoration history,'' even a critic like Tōyama Shigeki, who plays down the significance of *ee ja nai ka*, admits that it was a popular and widespread phenomenon. See Nishigaki Seiji, *Ee ja nai ka: minshū undō no keifu* (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, 1973), 252; and Tōyama Shigeki, *Meiji ishin to gendai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968), 103.

for instance, writes that *ee ja nai ka* was inseparably bound up with the hope of *yonaoshi* felt by the people at large in their disgust with the old regime. Itō points out that the number of rural uprisings declined from a record 106 in 1866 to a mere 34 in 1867—the year of the *ee ja nai ka* celebrations—before climbing to a new peak of 108 in 1868.[33]

The records of the city of Kyoto illustrate how divisive the *ee ja nai ka* frenzies could be at a crucial time in Japanese political history. The city was beset in 1867 not only by the intrigues that would result in the imperial restoration, but also by real economic hardship. White rice indexed at 304.6 in 1865 jumped nearly fourfold to a price indexed at 1147.6 for 1867. Soy sauce was up about 150 percent in two years, saké almost 200 percent, while *miso* or bean paste tripled in price.[34] At this point, in the tenth month of 1867, "popular *ee ja nai ka* activity, with no warning at all, suddenly, and with unpredictable scale and duration, appeared as a storm of . . . mass hysteria." But the compilers of the history of Kyoto will not consign *ee ja nai ka* to the category of inexplicable hysterical behavior. "When this activity is investigated closely, it becomes clear that it is activity in which the populace rejects the forms, values, and ethical norms of everyday life, [causing] society itself to tremble from the ground up."[35] More than sixty places throughout Kyoto were sites of continuing *ee ja nai ka* frenzies, almost all of them commercial neighborhoods and many in the city's busiest centers—Pontochō, Gion, Teramachi, Sanjō, Gojō, Horikawa. While the frenzies in Kyoto declined during the eleventh month, they did not stop until the new government took over the city in January of 1868.[36]

Such efforts to defy public mores and mold new realities amount to political acts of violence against the old regime. This is so whether or not the commoners involved were subjectively trying to attack the status quo. All these new mass phenomena involved acts of radical desperation committed by people whose world view transcended the existing situation in Japan. Through the disorders in which they took part, they were attempting to design new patterns for the ultimate purpose of reintegrating Japan. The effect, they hoped, would be to realign their conception of the world with the cultural ethos through which they experienced reality. For world view and ethos had gotten out of alignment in the distress of the bakumatsu perils.[37]

[33] Itō Tadao, "Ee ja nai ka," in *Yonaoshi*, Sasaki Junnosuke, ed., Vol. 5 of *Nihon minshū no rekishi* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1974), 312–13, 327–28. A table of the frequency of rural uprisings appears on page 328.

[34] *Ishin no gekidō*, Vol. 7 of *Kyōto no rekishi* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1974), 172.

[35] *Ibid.*, 186.

[36] *Ibid.*, 360.

[37] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 89–90, holds that the relation between the two concepts of ethos and world view is one of mutual confirmation: "In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life."

Popular participation in disorders, pilgrimages, and carnivals was deeply unsettling to all samurai and all political leaders, whether of the old regime or the new one that was forming. Few of these leaders could see the people as a constructive force, and in the general Confucian frame of ideological perception such manifestations of popular discontent were regarded as improper and dangerous. Uprisings in the countryside and city crowds and mobs conveyed this sense of unsettled lives and political malaise. Such happenings frightened the imperial loyalists as much as they did the bakufu and the daimyo.[38] In principle one might try to argue a causal link between the rise of chiliastic behavior among commoners and the increased militancy of the loyalist samurai, but there is no reliable evidence to confirm a connection. It is true, though, that the loyalists concluded that the bakufu and its attendant systems were bankrupt just at the time when the *ee ja nai ka* carnivalers were making nonsense out of the downtown streets of many large Japanese cities, in the autumn of 1867.

But imperial loyalist sentiment arose earlier in quite a different context— among samurai who were willing to court anarchy in order to accomplish their objectives. These were very different figures from the cautious officials of the bakufu and the feudal domains. These samurai saw a black-and-white world that badly needed changing. Their appreciation of politics was tempered by a highly formal view of society, community, and the world as a congeries of dispersed idiographic entities. In chaos they quested for redemption, not order. Their overriding motive was to redeem the honor of Japan; a lesser one was to pacify the country, though that task too was part of the redeemer's role.

A profile of the imperial loyalist samurai must allow for a variety of motives that nonetheless coalesce into a situationally transcendent impulse. Some samurai turned old grudges into the stuff of new power relations. Some sought simple self-gratification. Others sympathized with the plight of the poor commoners, whereas still others championed the cause of Japan against the ravages of foreign intervention in Japanese internal affairs. The motives of all these samurai fed the stream that flooded the political ground of the mid-1860s, and they were finally channeled into a disposition not only to overthrow the bakufu, but also to make a new Japan, a country that would be better able to meet its domestic and international problems. Not all of the loyalists were simplifiers, but they shared a sense of adventure which animated them to try every kind of change, from political coup to more tedious if novel attempts to grasp the power of the realm.

What characterizes all imperial loyalists is their unwillingness to wait. There lay the source of their fundamental dissatisfaction with the old regime. The loyalists aimed to disperse all the other forces in order to attain their own ends. Needing the cachet of a new movement to propel them, they sought to

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[38] Itō, ''Ee ja nai ka,'' 324–31.

mobilize the ancient Japanese myths on their side. As they appropriated the historical mythology, they let loose powerful levers for change, more powerful than any of the underlying institutional patterns of change that can be charted and measured through the long duration of the Tokugawa period. When it fell to the loyalists in their hour of triumph to keep the realm intact, they found it hard to do. The genie rarely goes back into the bottle.

Early in the fall of 1866, just when the bakufu was about to abort its expedition to punish Chōshū, two samurai surreptitiously left a stunning (and strictly proscribed) indictment of the old regime outside a bakufu office in the teeming Edo subcenter of Koishikawa. Although the writers, using pseudonyms, called the Chōshū armies "traitors" and referred to the bakufu armies as "official" ("*kangun*"), their object was to reveal the faults of the existing system. The text also makes it plain that the authors had devised a broad spectrum of reforms designed to redeem Japan in its own eyes and those of the wider world. Chōshū's people right down to the most ordinary folk, states the text, were willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the domain. Were the people of Edo so dedicated? What the bakufu needed was an "army of righteousness" ("*jingi no hei*") to carry out a twelve-point program of national redemption. Here are the principal planks in the program:

> To assure employment for all, and eliminate poverty.
> To build hospitals, and institutions for the aged and handicapped.
> To lower food and commodity prices.
> To rehabilitate rather than execute criminals (except for murder).
> To eliminate starvation, thievery, and indolence.
> To educate the citizenry in proper schools.
> To promote talent and merit irrespective of social status.

If these and other measures were taken, presumably by the bakufu but in principle by any national leadership, Japan could become a "natural good government" ("*shizen no jinsei*"), make foreign trade flourish, and "enrich the country and strengthen the military." Ultimately Japan ("Nihonkoku") would become "the world's foremost good country" ("*sekai daiichi no zenkoku*").[39] Even the use of the word "Nihonkoku" for Japan in relation to "the world" ("*sekai*") suggests a foretaste of nationalistic thinking rare for 1866 among samurai of modest means. This is clearly a use meant to extend beyond the governing elites and embrace the people of the country. In short, it was intended to construe them all as one nation.[40]

The impact of so sweeping a statement as this Koishikawa manifesto could not be lost on a contemporary reader. Bakufu officials who saw it probably laid it to visionary folly and shrugged, or quietly resented their own inability

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[39] "Tora hachigatsu Koishikawa," in *Bakumatsu hishi shinbun kaisō,* Meiji Bunka Kenkyūkai, ed. (1934; rpt. Tokyo: Meicho Kankōkai, 1968), 269–71.
[40] Tanaka Akira, *Meiji ishin,* Vol. 24 of *Nihon no rekishi* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1976), 28.

to implement its proposals. The manifesto was traditional in that the Confucian phrases for order and good government appear, but it was revolutionary, too, in its insistence on a utopian transformation that would redeem a desperate situation at home as well as abroad.[41] The two worried authors, who called themselves Ōkawabe Chikara and Takeda Shūunsai, wanted more than anyone could then achieve. Neither the old nor the new regime could fulfill such hopes immediately. The demands expressed in the text resemble the dreams of millenarian commoners who would later be discouraged by the new government. The quest-romance symbolized by these two Koishikawa writers never reached fruition. Yet some of their ambitions for Japan finally did become the grandest achievements of the Meiji oligarchs, such as the expansion of overseas trade, termination of the unequal treaties, and especially "the enrichment of the country and strengthening of the military" (fukoku kyōhei). Probably the makers of the manifesto never survived the turmoil of 1866–69; certainly no one ever came forward claiming to be Ōkawabe or Takeda. And even if they did indicate an allegiance to the bakufu in their words, their sentiments put them in the camp of the simplifiers and sloganeers who sought Japan's redemption in the emperor's name.

The struggle that culminated in the Meiji Restoration consumed many of these loyalists, victims of bakufu or daimyo justice, or targets of the over-simplifying zealots known as *shishi* within their own loyalist ranks. Yet those who lasted out the struggles were the ones who inherited the realm. It was not easy, however, to reimpose order amid such chaos.

Although the survivors did manage to restore order, they paid a high price to do so. They mortgaged the future of Japan to their own ability to imagine a reconstruction program. As simplifiers themselves, even the best of them were disinclined to be generous. They came down hard on internal dissent, because they distrusted the diversity that they themselves had helped to sow, and they feared proposed solutions that were mutually conflicting. The situation they transcended was also one they overcame—by destroying it—and they were left holding the empty bag. It was up to these loyalist survivors to fill that bag, and they did not long countenance the menacing residues of other situationally transcendent forces, such as the followers of Tenrikyō or the makers of rural uprisings.

It is the common people that other treatments of the Meiji Restoration have often overlooked. Their rebellions, cult behavior, pilgrimages, and carnivals do not lend themselves to the kind of neat causal explanation that most historians normally seek. Documentation is scanty and incomplete, much of it nontraditional in nature. The letters, memoranda, and state papers prepared by the well-educated leaders of this era do not accord much space to the

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[41] Tanaka Akira, "Bakufu no tōkai," in *Kinsei 5*, Vol. 13 of *Iwanami kōza nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977), 344.

doings of the masses, whose foibles and expressions of concern must have gone substantially unrecorded. We cannot establish connections among revivalist and millenarian movements, and it is hard to insert the manifestations of popular distress into a straightforward narrative focusing on the politics of Japanese reform, exclusion, and imperial loyalism. That these various popular phenomena did erupt at a time when rural riots were on the increase in the middle 1860s is undeniable, but it appears coincidental, or simply epiphenomenal, as if the troubled times would naturally spawn public fears and anxieties and produce an outbreak of symptoms of social unrest.

Of course, coincidence on its face is neither a result nor a byproduct of anything. The public outcry over the state of the world and the yearning for *yonaoshi* represent constituent elements of the history of bakumatsu Japan. We ignore the appearance of these manifestations at the risk of constructing an inadequate account of what happened, for the masses who took some part in the turmoil of life in the 1860s make up a sizeable portion of the Japanese population at the time. Whether their expressions of concern should be treated as "meaningful coincidences"—instances of *synchronicity*, without cause-and-effect attribution—or just as markers on the known historical terrain is a matter that cannot be decided by appeal to evidence alone.[42] But theirs were powerful expressions that color the period's history and give it depth. It follows that in the arrangement of historical actors for this essay "the people" occupy an important place.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

To conclude the essay requires drawing up a balance sheet of sorts. What are the advantages of the method outlined here? Are there disadvantages that offset or invalidate the method? Lack of voluminous supporting evidence weakens the force of any argument that bases itself on the motives of the actors, but this offsetting condition does not render the claims of the argument invalid. Such claims will remain, perhaps indefinitely, hypothetical, or abductively logical, in the term preferred by Charles Sanders Peirce.[43] On the other hand, among the advantages of this method are its freshness and feel of authenticity. The motivational approach to bakumatsu history leads right past

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[42] Carl Gustav Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, R. F. C. Hull, trans., Bollingen Series, no. 20 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 417–531.

[43] Peirce mentions abductive reasoning in several places. He regarded it as an alternative to inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning (from the particular to the general, from the general to the particular). He said that we can know only the facts we can observe (perceive), and if they are insufficient to allow inference we must add "guess-work," which leads to "the first starting of a hypothesis": this step itself is what he called *abduction*. Even if we cannot prove X, for example, if Y were provable then X would also be provable; hence, abductive reasoning, which Peirce thought characterizes most of our inferences anyway. See Charles Sanders Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, Justus Buchler, ed. (New York: Dover, 1955), 150–52.

tired controversies that have locked scholars in combat without resolution. Marxists and modernization theorists have no place here. They both posit evolutionary schemes that assume a progression from darkness to light, from barbarity to some kind of utopia. But the punctuated disequilibria of bakumatsu times defy evolutionary theory of whatever ideological stripe.

By contrast, the object of motivational history is to study the groups of actors themselves so as to discern their purposes and what they seem to have thought was happening. This kind of analysis depends on the historian's ability to fathom the perceptions and motives of the actors. It is obligatory to forsake the conventional realm of cause-and-effect explanation; instead, we need to confront and give paramountcy to the disruptions and upheavals that shook the people who were there when the Meiji Restoration was gestating.

From such a perspective it is possible to see how unlikely any particular outcome was. The actors were continually surprised by every turn of events. Plans and blueprints had no practical worth. These people were obliged to act on an ad hoc basis, and their improvisations followed no fixed program, but only the deeper cultural and subcultural inclinations that prefigured their attitudes and perhaps guided their actions. Recognizing this diversity of perception and motive, the method proposed in this article requires taking the history of Japan from the late 1850s to about 1870 and bringing it toward a new interpretation. Such an interpretation must acknowledge the place of all sorts of impulses that historians usually relegate to epiphenomenal status. Examples include the abrupt rise of new religious followings, the outbreak of angry riots in cities and villages, but also the sudden release of energy through carnivals in the streets. Normally wary of myth, historians moving toward such a new interpretation must also recognize claims of inspiration from mythical sources such as the ones that arose from the timely rediscovery of the Japanese imperial institution and its liminal utility in politics. These sweeping trends all assume importance because of the application to historical problems and data of concepts developed by ethnography, religious studies, literary criticism, and other intellectual disciplines. The integration of these trends into a set of four overlapping stories goes farther than do the usual political accounts to explain the rapidity of the changes that followed the Meiji Restoration. The new leaders not only needed to build a central government, they also felt obliged to suppress potential challenges to their authority in the form of irregular and antinomian trends. Their government could thereby be perpetuated through maintaining social stability.[44]

Negative and cautionary problems remain. The high degree of formalism in

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[44] The imperial loyalists were adventurous romantics who expended immense efforts to build an empire. It would therefore be interesting to apply Martin Green's method of linking adolescent reading habits with adult political activities in the British Empire to the data of Meiji Japan. See Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

this explanatory scheme bespeaks my lack of confidence in what historians normally applaud, namely, the diversity of history. So diverse is history that ultimately it may prove wiser to admit the need to impose order on its data than to suffer with the effort to construct a narrative that insists too stridently upon "objectivity." More directly, I have assumed a cross-cultural similarity of motives, and this assumption may be unwarranted. Even though allowance can be made for ideological variables different from those of Western Europe or the United States, is it possible to posit a universal human set of cognitive attitudes? This whole scheme rests conceptually on Hayden White's Euro-centric doctrine of formal rhetorical determinism with its assertion of linguistic deep structures, or poetics, as prefiguring forces in deciding how history will be perceived and how language will be deployed in order to convey historical narratives and interpretations.[45] Even if White is correct in his ambitious assessment of the European mind, how can anyone begin from the presumption of a similar Japanese psychology? It would be nice to do so, if only because it would help give the lie to Western conceits about the uniqueness of the modern *mentalité* and the alleged inscrutability of the Oriental mind. But this presumption of similarity is a hypothesis, and one that can be tarnished to the extent that linguistic theory does succeed in indicating a correspondence between linguistic protocols and cognitive attitudes toward the perceived world. As languages differ, in other words, so may knowledge and perception.

Still this may be a worthy effort. For too long, a kind of acquired historicism (it is not innate) has directed scholars toward writing smooth, almost homogenized narratives and painting conveniently well ordered and congruous pictures of events in the past. Looking back to the principals for evidence of their conflicts should facilitate mirroring the *present* they faced, rather than our own *past,* as they lived through dilemmas that we can only reconstruct, not relive. This historiographical refinement carries the potential for making the past more like the present, in which we see multiple causes and multiple avenues of future action because we cannot yet benefit by hindsight. Like scientists who specialize in elementary particle physics, historians can focus on the interactions among the occupants of the field instead of emphasizing the activities of just one single sort of occupant. Winners and losers appear in the shifting context of their interactions and interrelations.

The method staked out here is "structuralist" in some sense or other, and the implications of structuralism—however the term may be defined—will

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[45] Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). White employs Frye's scheme of plot structures (*mythoi*), Pepper's typology of explanatory strategies, and Mannheim's dichotomy of situational congruence and situational transcendence. White's articles convey his method as effectively as the larger book does. Several of his best "essays in cultural criticism" are collected in his *Tropics of Discourse.*

carry the investigator toward a holistic view of the problem. If the narrative divides to accommodate the motives of four separate groups of actors, it reunites in the holism of the structuralist perspective.[46] The transdisciplinary potential of this method can allow historians to examine the face of bakumatsu Japan and the Meiji Restoration as a whole—as a configuration or gestalt. The negative side of this totalization process is that no scheme or intellectual system can comprehend all of the transformations that the system is capable of generating. The wily Kurt Gödel, engaging the *Principia Mathematica* of Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, demonstrated by using the terms of their own brilliant system that its axioms could not yield all of the theorems and propositions that are compatible with it.[47]

A like conclusion applies to history, that inexact discipline, where accident and circumstance play a necessarily more prominent role than they do in the mathematical sciences. No deductive scheme can, by the use of logic alone, produce all of the truths or suggest all of the action permutations that may arise from its principles. Nor can the method proposed in this essay—to view the watershed years of bakumatsu Japan through the stories of four groups of protagonists—succeed in revealing all the plots and motives that contributed to the history of the Meiji Restoration, its prelude, or the novel coda that followed it. But the method can provide a new perspective on the interactions between the chief historical agents on the scene at the time. And it can help to illuminate some of their seemingly confused acts and purposes.

[46] My sense of structuralism generally follows the summary by Jean Piaget more than that of Peter Caws. Both are clear expositions of a movement whose "movers" refuse to acknowledge their likenesses, and both are prescient about the intellectual development of structuralism across many disciplines during the 1970s. Both identify linguistics as the source of inspiration for structuralism. But Piaget stresses the holism of structuralist systems in their synchronic approach to problems, whereas Caws emphasizes the patterns of binary opposites, polarities, and complementarities that are often employed to explicate structuralist arguments. See Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, Chaninah Maschler, trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Peter Caws, "Structuralism," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), IV, 322–30.

[47] See Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Gödel's Proof* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), 3–6, 98–99.