

A REACTIVE ENGINEER

Japanese History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity (1900-1926)

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There is a vast literature on the Japanese imperial state's role in fomenting a national identity through manipulating history in the early twentieth century. The general conclusions tend to depict the state as the coherent manager of the message, the leader who finished designing Japan's national identity by the later years of the Meiji period (1868-1912). This study uses history textbooks published between 1900 and 1926 to argue that this representation overlooks the passive and reactionary elements of the Japanese state. An analysis of the changing portrayals of historical events in three editions of state-issued textbooks (1903, 1909, and 1920) and several non-state-issued textbooks yields a complex image of the Japanese imperial state, one that is less aggressive than previously assumed. The incoherent messages of early state-issued textbooks and the nationalistic clarity in private textbooks point to a tug-of-war relationship between private textbooks and state-issued textbooks, suggesting that the Japanese state was not the sole engineer of the representation of a "Japanese national identity." An eloquent discourse on Japan's national identity was not achieved until the Taishō years (1912-1926), when the state was forced to react to a society disrupted by riots by allying itself with messages promoted in non-state-issued textbooks. This study is part of the growing literature that diverges from the traditional argument of an omnipotent Japanese state, enhancing our understanding of Japanese society as we approach World War II.

I. Introduction

In 1911, parliamentary confrontations and public protests nearly toppled Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Tarō's cabinet. A former army general who fought in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905), Katsura considered this incident the most worrisome event of his career.¹ In 1911 Japan was embroiled in an unexpected war, one that was fundamentally different from the two great Meiji Wars. The war of 1911 was not fought against foreigners and the unrest did not arise from territorial disputes. Instead, the 1911 conflict was an internal war over textbook representations of an event in the fourteenth century, in which two imperial courts existed simultaneously. Although no blood was shed during this war, the stakes were high, for those who waged the textbook war of 1911 competed with the government over the right to define a national identity for Japan. The attention of the Japanese government and society turned towards primary school textbooks as education policies, history, and state doctrine collided.

Primary school history textbooks became a source of tension in 1911 because they were central to the state's efforts to articulate a national identity. As the Japanese government expanded compulsory education from four to six years after 1907, virtually all Japanese children were exposed to state-approved and state-compiled primary school textbooks.² Textbooks are therefore useful sources for historians to examine which ideas the imperial Japanese state valued and what form of identity it wanted its citizens to assume. This study will analyze Japanese history textbooks published in the period from 1900 to 1926, covering the end of the Meiji period (1868–1912), and the entirety of the Taishō period (1912–1926). The inquiry begins in 1900, the year that marks the beginning of what scholars often call the “greater Taishō” period (1900–1930). This period was characterized by Japan's disillusionment with the West after the bloodbath of the First World War, the rise of mass movements such as protests for universal male suffrage, and Japan's transformation into a formidable international power.³ This study will use textbooks to answer the following questions about this period: How did the state define “Japanese national identity?” What was the relationship between history and national identity? How did portrayals of national identity change as the state reacted to threats to its authority? Why did nationalistic ideas not solidify until the period of Taishō, rather than during the late Meiji? Was the state the engineer of the national identity and imperial ideology that we now call the emperor system?

Many historians have analyzed the topic of Japan's imperial identity and the state's role in the process. Irokawa Daikichi argues that the Japanese state adopted a trial and error approach towards the promotion of national identity, and that the emperor system was not completed until the end of the Meiji period in 1912. Irokawa thus disagrees with Maruyama Masao, who wrote in his famous 1946 essay that during the Meiji period a national identity already penetrated Japan deeply enough to become its “spiritual axis.” Once the system reached its final form in 1912, Irokawa believed it acted as a “hideous miasma” that enveloped the popular mind.⁴ Carol Gluck, on the other hand, contends that “the task of influencing the people remained ever incomplete” as different state and non–state institutions dispersed competing conceptions of Japan's national

1 John S. Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600–1945: The Age of the Gods and Emperor Jimmu* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 121.

2 Byron K. Marshall, *Learning to Be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 93.

3 Sharon Minichiello, *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900–1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 2.

4 Daikichi Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 13.

identity.⁵

Gluck and Irokawa's works focus heavily on the Meiji period (1868–1912). Even Gluck, who maintains that the state was reforming Japan's national identity up until the day of surrender, writes of the Taishō era in the context of political change rather than as a period of ideological experimentation. The disregard in these two works for the Taishō era is not unusual. In *Japanese Historians and the National Myths*, immediately after analyzing the Northern and Southern Courts Controversy of 1911, John S. Brownlee completely skips over the Taishō years and writes of the nationalist historians of the 1930s. As this essay will argue, the state's representation of Japanese national identity remained flexible until the Taishō era, thus the story of identity construction in the Taishō era must be explored.

There is excellent scholarship on Japanese education, with some works focusing exclusively on textbooks. Unfortunately, this literature seldom connects with the greater political context of Japan. One example is James C. Baxter's essay, "Shaping National Historical Consciousness." In his essay, Baxter notes that prior to the 1909 editions, textbooks rarely used phrases such as "*wagakuni*" (our country) to foster nationalism.⁶ Yet Baxter does not consider *why* there was a change in 1909 or what its implications might be. Other writers on Japanese education presume a powerful and organized state disseminating ideology, such as Horio Teruhisa who writes that Japanese education before the Second World War succeeded in propagating "the big lie."⁷ In his representation of the Japanese state as the main engineer of a Japanese national identity, Horio rarely discusses society's role in promoting the "big lie" and the state's failures during the process, which are two key themes in my argument.

An exception to the trend of dismissing Taishō and overlooking the state's failure in imposing a national identity is Byron Marshall's *Learning to be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education*. After tracing the criminal indictments against Professors Morito Tatsuo and Ōuchi Hyōe, who together published an article on anarchism, Marshall emphasizes that "no cabinet would actually again use the weapon of criminal indictments against an imperial university faculty member for almost ten years," because press coverage of the trials allowed a broader audience to understand the term "anarchism."⁸ Despite its merits, Marshall's book still narrates education reform as a top-down process. As I will argue, the nationalistic rhetoric in the first two editions of the state textbooks is curiously restrained because the state was not the leader of identity construction. This does not sit easily with Marshall's analysis, but is central to my own.

A. *Regulating Identity: Kokutai and Education Policies*

The Japanese state's desire to inculcate a modern Japanese identity for its people can be traced to the Meiji Restoration.⁹ History was crucial to the pursuit of defining a national identity because,

5 Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 279.

6 James C. Baxter, "Shaping National Historical Consciousness: Japanese History Textbooks in Meiji-Era Elementary Schools," in *Writing Histories in Japan: Texts and Their Transformations from Ancient Times through the Meiji Era*, by James C. Baxter and Joshua A. Fogel (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2007), 333.

7 Teruhisa Horio, *Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan: State Authority and Intellectual Freedom*, trans. Steven Platzer (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1988), 105.

8 Marshall, *Learning to Be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education*, 113.

9 Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 3.

as historian Nakamura Masanori writes, “history, as people understand it, is what gives them their self-image.”¹⁰ The 1889 Meiji Constitution highlighted the relationship between history and national identity in Japan. The first article of the Constitution referred to the allegedly historical “imperial line unbroken for ages eternal” (*bansei ikkei*), and vested sovereignty within the emperor.¹¹ The Constitution proclaimed the emperor as “sacred and inviolable,” and derived his power and status from a series of ancient myths about the origins of Japan.¹² These myths were the foundation of *kokutai*. *Kokutai*—a Japanese word that does not have an adequate English equivalent—has often been translated as “national polity” or “national body.” The reason being *koku* (国) means nation, and *tai* (体) means body. I believe, however, that the phrase “national essence” captures the meaning of *kokutai* more completely. As any translation will distort the meaning and values embedded in this word, I will use the Japanese word *kokutai* throughout this essay.

According to myths, Japan’s *kokutai* begins with the Sun Goddess, who dispatched her Heavenly Grandchild to Japan to rule the land and granted everlasting prosperity to the Japanese imperial house. Due to Japan’s history as an island country that was not invaded by a foreign power until the Second World War, the illusion of an “imperial line unbroken for ages eternal” was uncontested in Japan before 1945.¹³ History was employed to prove the existence of the Age of the Gods (when the Sun Goddess and other deities supposedly lived) and an unbroken imperial line.

The concept of *kokutai* is not a product of the Meiji period.¹⁴ In his 1936 study on *kokutai*, Itō Tasaburō did not provide a detailed definition for *kokutai* because “every Japanese knows its meaning perfectly well” for records of history, such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, had promoted the idea of *kokutai* since the eighth century.¹⁵ Nevertheless, interpretations of the word changed overtime. In the 1870s, the predominant view was that *kokutai* constitutes the essence of a nation, what “in Western language they call ‘nationality.’”¹⁶ By the late 1880s, discussions of *kokutai* began to focus on its immutability and distinctiveness, and references to *kokutai* of other countries were omitted.¹⁷ *Kokutai* became a separate entity from *seitai* (political structure), and gradually the word was used to refer to an ageless past, to represent the embodiment of Japan, and to distinguish the Japanese nation from “others.” Since the imperial house was at the root of *kokutai*, the “natural bond between the emperor and the people” became the criterion for being Japanese—one was Japanese when one was a subject of the imperial house.¹⁸

Because the defining feature of Japanese identity and the legitimacy of imperial rule rested upon a particular version of history, history was a state affair. The state identified education as a key tool for regulating history. Mori Arinori, the first Minister of Education (1885–1889), asserted that *kokutai*, the “unique spiritual inheritance” of Japan, should be the basis of an education system that would “cultivate persons who will be the faithful subjects required by the Empire.”¹⁹ The role of education in state ideology and national identity was crystalized in the 1890 Imperial

10 Masanori Nakamura, “Rekishigaku to rekishi jujutsu.” *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 716 (November 1998), 168 quoted in Baxter, “Shaping National Historical Consciousness: Japanese History Textbooks in Meiji-Era Elementary Schools,” 317.

11 Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 77.

12 Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945*, 7.

13 Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, 249.

14 *Ibid.*, 248.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 144.

17 *Ibid.*, 145.

18 Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, 257.

19 Horio, *Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan*, 69.

Rescript on Education, which located the emperor at the center of national morality and national education.²⁰

The government regulated textbooks to ensure that students would be exposed to “accurate history.” In 1881, the government issued “Key Points of the Principles of Instruction for Primary Schools,” which made state ratification a requirement for all textbooks.²¹ Believing that history would introduce students to “the system whereby the nation was founded,” the “Key Points” established history education as a required subject for years five and six.²² Centralization tightened over the years and culminated in the 1903 “Ordinance on Primary Schools,” which dictated that only textbooks designated by the state could be used in elementary schools.²³ In four subjects (ethics, history, language, and geography), the Textbook Committee of the Ministry of Education replaced private publishers as authors of primary school textbooks.

The Ministry of Education issued three state history textbooks during this period: the first edition in 1903, the second edition in 1909, and the third edition in 1920. As these textbooks are long and range from the beginning of Japanese history (the Age of the Gods) to current events, this study will focus on three features of these textbooks. The first is the portrayal of *kokutai*, including the mentions of the word and the explanation of the concept. The second is the depiction of warrior rule. Excluding one short-lived attempt of imperial restoration by Emperor Go-Daigo in 1333, Japan was under warrior rule from the Kamakura Period (1185–1333) to the Meiji Restoration.²⁴ Textbook representations of warrior rule allow us to understand the importance of the imperial house in shaping the state’s perception of Japanese identity. The third feature to be analyzed is the Southern and Northern Courts of the fourteenth century, as contemporary historians had to resolve the paradox of an “unbroken imperial line” that had once been divided into two courts. This study will also examine non-state textbooks. The term “non-state textbooks” is slightly misleading because while private scholars, instead of state officials, authored the “non-state textbooks,” the state still approved them. These non-state textbooks include primary school history textbooks published between 1900 and 1902 (before the Ministry of Education centralized authorship in 1903) and middle school history textbooks issued between 1900 and 1926. An analysis of state and non-state textbooks published in the late Meiji and Taishō periods reveal that the Japanese state was a passive and reactive player of identity construction, as opposed to private scholars, who were at the vanguard of developing an aggressive nationalistic rhetoric.

20 Ibid.

21 Baxter, “Shaping National Historical Consciousness: Japanese History Textbooks in Meiji-Era Elementary Schools,” 321.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 327.

24 It should be noted that while this date is generally accepted, some historians trace the beginning of warrior rule to Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181). Moreover, the nature of “warrior rule” itself is ambiguous as the degree in which imperial authority was compromised differed greatly. This essay will use the term “warrior rule” as the textbooks use it – a rule in which a warrior (usually under the title of shogun), or multiple warriors as it was the case during the Warring States Period, exercised authority along with the emperor.

II. State Textbooks: Uncertain Ideas

A. Usage and Meaning of *Kokutai*

At the core of *kokutai* is the idea of an unbroken imperial line that began with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. It is therefore unsurprising that all state-issued history textbooks of this period opened with a chapter on the Sun Goddess. The 1903 Japanese history textbook, the first state compiled edition, set the precedent for all subsequent state textbooks by opening with the line “Amaterasu is our Emperor’s ancestor.”²⁵ The textbook further elaborated on the importance of the divine imperial line to Japan by explicitly stating that “the foundation of our Japanese Empire, which has not been hindered throughout the ages, was established here [by Amaterasu].”²⁶ The format of state textbooks promoted the idea of *kokutai* even further. All three editions of state textbooks issued in this period used emperor names as headings for chapters on early Japanese history (from the Age of Gods to around 700 CE). This generated an impression of continuity between the Age of Gods and the world of humans, and implied that Japan’s divine imperial line is the structure through which Japanese history should be understood.

While the 1903 state textbook asserted that the Sun Goddess was vital to Japan, it did not explain how or why. Neither did this edition use the word *kokutai* in its opening chapter on the Sun Goddess—an odd decision considering that the claim to divine imperial ancestry was in fact *kokutai*. The 1903 edition used the word *kokutai* once, in the chapter on the ideology of *sonnō jōi*.²⁷ The author wrote that it was during the late Tokugawa period when people began to “discuss our *kokutai* and clarify the reasons that the imperial house must be respected.”²⁸ The word *kokutai* was invoked without any remark on its meaning or significance. Though the two words appeared in the same sentence, the relationship between *kokutai* and the imperial house was tenuous. The textbook presented the acts of “discussing *kokutai*” and “respecting the imperial house” as two separate events, rather than as two acts intricately related to one another.

Irokawa suggests that because the state produced the 1903 textbooks hastily in a “crude crambook style,” they were only primitive attempts at the expression of the emperor system.²⁹ One can thus interpret the lack of references to *kokutai* as a result of the state’s rush to produce these textbooks. However, while Irokawa contends that the second edition issued in 1909 was able to fully articulate state doctrine, textbook rhetoric indicates that the second edition’s image of *kokutai* was still immature. Resembling the 1903 edition, the 1909 edition did not reference *kokutai* in its chapter on the Sun Goddess. Curiously, it also did not refer to *kokutai* in its last chapter, which attributes the progress of Japan to the benevolence of the emperor from the “unbroken imperial line” and the people who are one in their “spirit of loyalty to their lord and love of their country.”³⁰ This catechism is essentially a celebration of *kokutai*, which by definition

25 Monbushō, *Shōgaku nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1903), 441. Reprinted in: Tokiomi Kaigo, Arata Naka, and Isao Kishii, ed. *Nihon kyōkasho taikai*. Vol. 9. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1962). All citations to this text refer to the reprint, and the page numbers are according to the reprinted version.

26 Ibid.

27 *Sonnō jōi*, often translated as “Revere the emperor, expel the barbarians,” is a political philosophy and social movement that was prominent in the 1850s and 1860s, when it became the slogan to overthrow the Tokugawa bakufu.

28 Monbushō, *Shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 484.

29 Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, 301.

30 亦我が万世一系の天皇代代仁慈にましまして、常に御心を国利民福の増進に用ひ給ひ、国民亦世世心を一にして忠君愛國の精神を發揮したる結果に外ならず(*mata waga bansei ikkei no tennō daidai jinji ni mashi mashi te, tsune ni mikokoro wo kokuriminpuku no zōshin ni mochii tamai, kokumin mata seze kokoro wo itsu ni shite*

was the unbroken imperial line and the harmonious unity between the ruler and the people. Despite the silent presence of the concept, the author did not explicitly mention it.

Kokutai only appeared in two chapters of the 1909 edition: the chapter on *sonnō jōi*, as in the 1903 edition, and in the chapter on the Meiji Constitution, in which the textbook stated that the Constitution was “formulated based on our *kokutai*”³¹ The incorporation of the word *kokutai* in the chapter on the Meiji Constitution marked the first time that state textbooks acknowledged *kokutai* as a vital concept and an adequate foundation for modern Japan. Nevertheless, the 1909 edition did not define *kokutai* or trace its history. It used *kokutai* for its general meaning as “national essence,” not as an ideology. The absence of a clear ideology in the 1909 edition implies that the reason early textbooks could not express the emperor system effectively is more complicated than Irokawa suggests.

In 1920, when the government issued the third edition of its textbooks, *kokutai* permeated almost every chapter. The difference from the 1903 and 1909 editions was evident starting in the opening chapter on the Sun Goddess. Whereas the first two editions of the government textbooks described the connection to the Sun Goddess as the “foundation of our Japanese empire,” the 1920 edition proclaimed it as “the foundation of our *kokutai*.”³² The 1920 edition was the first state textbook to trace *kokutai* to the Age of Gods, to establish a relationship between *kokutai* and history, and to represent it as the keystone for a “Japanese identity.” By announcing the moment of the Sun Goddess’ oath as the moment in which the “unbroken imperial line of emperors, the foundation of our *kokutai*, which will forever remained unchanged, was established,” this textbook was also the first to imply that Japanese identity was closely connected to the imperial house.³³ *Kokutai*, here, was evoked for its conceptual relation to the imperial house, not simply for its literal meaning.

The 1920 edition even referenced the word *kokutai* in chapters seemingly irrelevant to *kokutai*. For example, the 1920 edition condemned Ashikaga Yoshimitsu’s³⁴ acceptance of the title of “King of Japan” from the Ming Emperor as an act that “neglected *kokutai*,” since “our country does not have another king aside from the emperor.”³⁵ The 1920 edition also gave historical figures who revered *kokutai* far greater treatment than the first two editions did. With explicit references to *kokutai*, the third edition dedicated entire chapters to figures such as Tokugawa Mitsukuni, Motoori Norinaga, and Takayama Hikokurō, who were given only cursory treatment in the 1903 and 1909 editions.

It is in the third edition that the orthodox definition of *kokutai* reached a degree of sophistication. Prior to 1920, the word *kokutai* was rarely used and even when it was used it was detached from history, seldom explained, and downplayed in its significance. Contrary to Irokawa’s argument that a Japanese imperial identity reached its finalized form by 1911, the precise nature of that identity’s keystone, *kokutai*, remained malleable until 1920. The state’s experimentation

chūkun aikoku no seishin wo hakki shitaru kekka ni hokanara zu). Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1909), 559. Reprinted in: Tokiomi Kaigo, Arata Naka, and Isao Kishii, ed. *Nihon kyōkasho taikai*. Vol. 9. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1962). All citations to this text refer to the reprint, and the page numbers are according to the reprinted version.

31 Ibid., 551.

32 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1920), 623. Reprinted in: Tokiomi Kaigo, Arata Naka, and Isao Kishii, ed. *Nihon kyōkasho taikai*. Vol. 9. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1962). All citations to this text refer to the reprint, and the page numbers are according to the reprinted version.

33 Ibid.

34 Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408) was the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate (1401-1549), he ruled as shogun from 1368 to 1394.

35 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 666.

with concocting ideas and writing within the absence of a coherent ideology was not an isolated phenomenon; it was very much present in the textbooks' treatment of "warrior rule" as well.

B. Warrior Rule

Since the Kamakura period (1185–1333), warrior rule was the predominant form of rule in Japan. In 1868, to justify their claims to authority, the new Meiji leaders appealed to the emperor, and presented imperial rule—as opposed to warrior rule—as the traditional and rightful form of rule in Japan.³⁶ Itō Hirobumi, architect of the Meiji Constitution and the first Prime Minister of Japan, declared the emperor the "axis of the nation."³⁷ Japanese historians and the Ministry of Education were thus confronted with the problem of portraying a form of rule that lasted for centuries, but one that challenged the authority of the emperor and the "one ruler, many subjects" slogan popularized by the Restoration.³⁸

The first edition of the state textbooks demonstrated little disapproval of warrior rule. The chapter on the Kamakura period concluded plainly that "the warrior rule, which continued for roughly 700 years until the Meiji period, began here."³⁹ Though at times the 1903 textbook celebrated those who honored the "venerability of the court," it did not attack warrior rule or brand it contradictory to imperial rule.⁴⁰ This neutrality vanished in the 1909 and 1920 editions. The latter two editions did recognize the accomplishments of warrior rule, particularly the culture of frugality, but roundly condemned the form of government overall. The 1909 edition described warrior rule as a "perverted" system for Japan because "it is law that our Japanese Empire should be personally ruled by the emperor from the unbroken imperial line."⁴¹ The 1920 edition similarly considered warrior rule unfortunate because "the decreased prestige of the court is truly regretful."⁴² The 1909 and 1920 editions, then, were not critical of warrior rule for governmental failures on the part of a theoretically legitimate system, but for being an "abnormal" form of rule that removed the emperor from the center of the country.

All three state textbooks attributed the fall of the Tokugawa period—the end of warrior rule—to the rise of *kokugaku*, or the study of ancient Japanese thought and classics. The 1903 edition stated that due to the blossoming of *kokugaku*, the *sonnō* ("revere the emperor") ideal slowly developed, initiating discussions on *kokutai* as scholars explained "the reasons that the imperial house must be respected."⁴³ The underlying assumption was that imperial rule was so entrenched in Japan that those who studied Japanese classics would develop respect for the imperial house. Nevertheless, the 1903 textbook did not present "respect for the imperial house" and "appreciating warrior rule" as mutually exclusive practices. The textbook, albeit regretting

36 Bernard S. Silberman, "The Bureaucratic State in Japan: The Problem of Authority and Legitimacy," in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition*, ed. Tetsuo Najita and Victor J. Koschmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 233.

37 Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 76.

38 Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, 250.

39 Monbushō, *Shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 459.

40 Ibid., 483.

41 そもそも我が大日本帝國は万世一系の天皇政務を親裁し給ふを以て法とす。。遂には武將国政を執るの変態を生じたり(*somosomo waga dainippon teikoku wa bansei ikkei no tennōseimu wo shinsai shi tamau wo motte hō tosu... tsui ni wa bushō kokusei wo toru no hentai wo shōji tari*). Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 543.

42 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 651.

43 Monbushō, *Shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 484.

that “people, in some cases, only knew of the shogun, and did not know of the nobleness of the emperor,” did not insist that one could not support both warrior rule and imperial rule.⁴⁴

Conversely, the 1909 edition contended that due to Japanese historians such as Tokugawa Mitsukuni, who led the compilation of *Dai Nihon Shi* (Great History of Japan) in the seventeenth century, “people of this country came gradually to understand our *kokutai* and the reasons for the dignity of the imperial house, and they realized that the shogunal rule contradicts fundamental principles.”⁴⁵ Here, the textbook drew a direct relationship between “respecting imperial rule” and “abandoning warrior rule.” The increased knowledge of *kokutai* would inevitably lead to the end of warrior rule because warrior rule and imperial rule could not exist simultaneously. Likewise, the 1920 edition argued that because *kokugaku* thrived, people finally learned that “our Japanese Empire must be personally ruled by the emperor from the unbroken imperial line, and it is against fundamental principle for the shogunate to monopolize power.”⁴⁶

Paralleling the gradual development of *kokutai* in textbooks, the Ministry of Education’s criticisms against warrior rule were not immediately apparent in its first textbook. The first edition in 1903 did not recognize the alleged contradiction between warrior rule and imperial rule. It was not until the second edition that textbooks began to highlight the warrior–imperial rule paradox and to depict warrior rule as an abnormal phenomenon that was fortunately eradicated. The state was not guided by a concrete ideology when it designed its first textbook; rather, it was slowly polishing it over the period.

C. *Southern and Northern Courts*

Chapters on the period of Southern and Northern Courts yield insight into the formation of Japan’s national identity since it is a period of history that challenges the belief of an “unbroken imperial line.” In the fourteenth century, Emperor Go-Daigo overthrew the Kamakura bakufu and restored imperial rule. Soon after, Ashikaga Takauji, the first shogun under the Ashikaga shogunate, led a coup against the Emperor. Once he seized Kyoto, Takauji installed a new emperor, Emperor Kōmyō. Emperor Go-Daigo was forced to retreat into the mountains of Yoshino, but did not relinquish his claim to the throne. For 57 years, two imperial courts existed in Japan: the Northern Court established by Ashikaga Takauji and the Southern Court established by Emperor Go-Daigo. Though current scholars of Japanese history debate over which court had more authority, they generally refer to this period as the “Southern and Northern Courts” (*Nanbokuchō*). For historians in the late Meiji and Taishō period, however, this was a delicate issue. To admit that two courts existed simultaneously was to admit that the “unbroken imperial line”—as it was proclaimed in the 1889 Constitution—was, in actuality, once broken.

The Textbook Committee apparently did not recognize this as an issue and used the term “Southern and Northern Courts” for both its 1903 and 1909 history textbooks. The 1903 textbook titled the second chapter of volume two as the “Southern and Northern Courts” and asserted neutrally that after Go-Daigo escaped to Yoshino, “two emperors existed. The court in Yoshino

44 人、あるいは、将軍あるを知りて、天皇の尊きを知らざるものもありき (*hito, aruiwa, shōgun aru wo shiri te, tennō no tōtoki wo shirazaru mono mo ariki*). *Ibid.*, 483.

45 世人漸く我が国体の知りて皇室の尊厳なる所以を解し、幕府が政を執るの道理に違へることを覚りき。 (*sejin yōyaku waga kokutai no shirite koushitsu no songen naru yuen wo tokashi, bakufu ga sei wo toru no dōri ni tagaeru koto wo satoriki*). Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 544.

46 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 705.

was known as the Southern Court, the court in Kyoto was known as the Northern Court.”⁴⁷ The 1903 textbook expressed no doubt about the existence of two equally legitimate courts, a sentiment shared by the 1909 textbook which stated that two courts competed for legitimacy during the period. Both textbooks also termed the moment when Emperor Go-Kameyama of the Southern Court returned the imperial regalia to Emperor Go-Komatsu of the Northern Court (effectively relinquishing his authority as an emperor) as the “Unification of the Southern and Northern Courts.” There was minimal effort in the first two editions to settle the irony of the “Southern and Northern Courts.” The Ministry did not seem to consider the “unbroken imperial line” as so integral to Japan that it could not be violated.

The 1920 edition departed dramatically from the practice followed in the 1903 and 1909 textbooks. The textbook separated what was previously the chapter on the “Southern and Northern Courts” into several chapters named after famous figures of the period—Kusunoki Masashige, Nitta Yoshisada, Kitabatake Chikafusa, Kusunoki Masatsura, and Kikuchi Takemitsu. These figures were all Southern Court loyalists, recognized as the epitome of the *sonnō* ideal (“revering the emperor”). The 1920 edition also abolished the term “Unification of the Southern and Northern Courts” in favor of the new heading, “Emperor Go-Kameyama returns to Kyoto.”⁴⁸ The Northern Court was not represented in the chapter titles. The 1920 edition further discredited the Northern Court by stressing that Takauji installed an emperor in the North merely to avoid “[being labelled as] a rebel,” implying that Takauji was an illegitimate ruler and the emperor he installed had no right to the throne.⁴⁹ The 1920 textbook even inserted a new “eulogy” when writing of Takauji’s death. “Takauji received heavy rewards from Emperor Go-Daigo,” the author wrote, “yet he forgot his highness’ kindness and turned against the court, harmed those who were loyal [to the court], and even murdered those of the imperial house.”⁵⁰ The 1920 edition thus effectively expunged the Northern court’s claims from history and declared the Southern Court as the true successor of the Chrysanthemum throne. The imperial line thus remained unbroken for there was only one legitimate court at one moment in time.

Changes in state textbooks’ portrayal of *kokutai*, warrior rule, and the Southern–Northern Courts demonstrate that depictions of a “national identity” fluctuated until the 1920s. The general narrative of history textbooks did not change and history was certainly used to inculcate nationalism and loyalty for the emperor, but the earlier state textbooks lacked a solidified ideology with a defined structure. The 1903 edition did not hesitate to incorporate elements that opposed *kokutai*, nor did it negotiate these contradictions. Nationalistic ideology was more refined in the second edition, but even it had elements that discredited *kokutai*. The orthodox usage of *kokutai* and ideals of the emperor system did not prevail until the third edition in 1920. The state was lost in 1903 and 1909. It did not have the ability to explain *kokutai* to its people without contradicting itself and did not know how to use *kokutai* to unite its people into one. While all teachers’ manuals issued by the Ministry of Education since 1903 decree that “it is expected [through history education] students will understand *kokutai*, and foster principles that are necessary to become the country’s people,” this goal was not truly achieved until 1920.⁵¹ Prior to 1920, the state had a coherent vision, yet it did not have a coherent ideology to fulfill it.

47 Monbushō, *Shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 469.

48 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 665.

49 Ibid., 660.

50 Ibid., 664.

51 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi kyōshiyō* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1910), 24. Reprinted in Arata Naka, Shoten Iwanami, and Hideo Satō, ed. *Nihon kindai kyōkasho kyōjuhō shiryō shūsei*. Vol. 7 (Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki kabushiki kaisha, 1983). Note that the page numbers are according to the reprinted version.

III. Non-State Textbooks: Ideological Purity

Before 1920 the state could not eloquently express a national identity for its people, though an articulation of national identity may have existed before then. The seemingly sudden influx of *kokutai*-centric themes in later textbooks is not a sign of the Japanese state's rapid ideological invention, but rather a sign of the state's adoption of ideas from outside of the government, specifically from non-state textbooks. Before 1903, non-state textbooks already used the more forceful language and nationalistic themes that the state would eventually use for its 1920 state textbook.

References to *kokutai* as the essence of Japan, absent from state textbooks until 1920, can be found as early as 1901 in a Japanese history textbook by private scholar Kobayashi Hirosada. Kobayashi opened the textbook with the claim "students, you must now study our nation's history, understand that the Japanese Empire boasts a *kokutai* superior in the entire world... and thereby cultivate the spirit of citizens of Japan."⁵² Kobayashi did not use the word just in relation to *sonnō jōi*, as the first two editions of state textbooks did. Instead, he highlighted *kokutai* as the absolute core of Japan. A clearer understanding of the term *kokutai*, one similar to its meaning in the 1920 state textbook, was also present in a 1904 textbook by Ōmori Kingorō. In his introduction, Ōmori defined *kokutai* as "the deep relationship between emperor and subjects, similar to that of between father and son" and the "unbroken imperial line that has continued endlessly for 2500 years."⁵³ Early non-state textbooks thus achieved what state textbooks failed to do until 1920—they identified *kokutai* as fundamental to the Japanese experience, superior to other countries' "national essence," and a concept that can be easily accessed through Japanese history.

At times, the nationalistic ideology in non-state textbooks is even more potent than that of the 1920 state textbook. A 1910 textbook by Fujita Akira sought to formally define *kokutai*, a feat from which even the 1920 textbook shied away. At the end of the first chapter on the Age of the Gods, Fujita drew a diagram that summarized *kokutai* with a short equation "Our *kokutai* = emperor from the unbroken imperial line, the loyalty of the subjects, never disgraced by foreign countries = unparalleled *kokutai* and unparalleled history."⁵⁴ Ōmori Kingorō's 1922 textbook repeated the same definition for *kokutai*, and urged the students to recognize how fortunate they are to be able to learn about *kokutai*.⁵⁵ Some non-state textbooks also attributed Japan's rise in the international arena to *kokutai*. In the conclusion of his 1904 East Asian history textbook, after lamenting the decline of other East Asian powers, Ogawa Ginjirō wrote that since "Our Empire reveres the imperial house from the unbroken imperial line and maintains a *kokutai* that is completely intact," Japan was able to escape the tragic fate of its neighbors.⁵⁶ This greatly differs from state textbooks, which revered the "unparalleled *kokutai*" of Japan without identifying it as the main cause of Japan's progress.

Similarly, the idea of family state, another key facet of *kokutai* that asserted that the imperial subjects' loyalty to the emperor should resemble that of filial piety towards their parents, rarely appeared in state textbooks of the period, but was thoroughly explained in non-state textbooks. In Nakamura Kōya's 1921 textbook, Nakamura extolled the way in which "citizens [of Japan] revolve around and in unity with the imperial house, as if they are a big family...

52 Hirosada Kobayashi, *Shōgaku nihonshi* (Tokyo: Ikueisha, 1901), 4.

53 Kingorō Ōmori, *Chūtō nihon rekishi zen* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1904), 3.

54 Akira Fujita, *Chūtō nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1910), 4.

55 Kingorō Ōmori, *Chūtō nihon rekishi kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1922), 1.

56 Ginjirō Ogawa, *Chūtō kyōka tōyōshi zen* (Tokyo: Kinkōdō Shoseki, 1904), 148.

successive emperors loved the citizens as if they were his children, and the citizens admired the emperors as if he was their father.”⁵⁷ It is this family-like relationship, Nakamura continued, “that is the essence of our *kokutai*, and the reason for it being unparalleled in this world.”⁵⁸ Saitō Hishiō and Nakagawa Kazuo’s 1926 textbook also dedicated an entire chapter to the “beautiful relations of the emperor and [his] subjects,” declaring that this, as well as *kokutai*, should be the source of Japanese people’s pride.⁵⁹

Obviously, not all non-state textbooks’ usage of *kokutai* aligned with the 1920 edition’s usage. Some did not use the word at all, such as the textbook published by Kyōiku dōshikai in 1901. Sometimes when the non-state textbooks mentioned *kokutai*, they did not use it in the conventional meaning that was popularized in the 1890s. In the 1911 edition of his East Asian textbook, Kuwabara Jitsuzō wrote that the difference between the *kokutai* of Japan and the *kokutai* of China is that in China dynasties rise and fall, but in Japan the dynasty had been unhindered.⁶⁰ Contrasting the various forms of imperial rule in China, there had only been one imperial rule in Japan. Kuwabara also titled the chapter concerning Yuan Shikai’s crowning himself emperor in 1913 as “Yuan Shikai’s Change of *kokutai*.”⁶¹ Kuwabara thus used *kokutai* as a close synonym for “government,” not as a term for an unalterable and timeless “national essence.” Though not all non-state textbooks used *kokutai* for its orthodox meaning, it is surprising that the Ministry of Education did not adopt the *kokutai*-centric rhetoric that was so prevalent in the majority of non-state textbooks, and instead chose to disseminate a rather flawed and vague ideology.

The disdainful tone and criticisms against warrior rule are similar in both state and non-state textbooks, but it was non-state textbooks that led the celebration of imperial rule. A 1904 textbook exclaimed that despite the 682 years of warrior rule, “the dignity of the imperial house remained unchanged throughout the period,” and this proved the endurance of Japan’s *kokutai*.⁶² The textbook presented warrior rule as a toxic form of governance that endangered *kokutai*, an argument unseen in state textbooks until the 1909 edition. Furthermore, paralleling the 1920 state edition, the 1899 textbook by Gakkai shishinsha and the 1901 textbook by Kyōiku dōshikai each devoted an entire chapter to Tokugawa Mitsukuni, admiring him for his efforts in awakening people’s reverence for the imperial house. A private textbook from 1900 even detailed the story of Tokugawa Mitsukuni facing west on every New Year’s morning to bow towards the palace of Kyoto, a story that the 1920 state edition would also retell.⁶³ In contrast, the 1903 and 1909 editions briefly discussed Tokugawa Mitsukuni in just one sentence. By amplifying the praises for imperial rule and *kokutai* early on, non-state textbooks effortlessly resolved the problem of warrior rule when state textbooks continued to wrestle with it.

Some non-state textbooks from later periods adopted even stronger rhetoric than the 1920 edition in their presentation of warrior rule, as they claim that warrior rule did not eliminate people’s loyalty to the emperor. A 1921 textbook edition commented that “when we look at our country’s *kokutai*, from the beginning warrior rule is an abnormal government, to defeat this, movements to revive imperial rule occurred repeatedly.”⁶⁴ Challenging the assumption in state

57 Kōya Nakamura, *Chūtō nihonshi jyōkyūyō* (Tokyo: Banseikan, 1921), 3.

58 Ibid., 4.

59 Hishiō Saitō and Kazuo Nakagawa, *Chūtō nihonshi dai go gakunen yō* (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Tosho, 1926), 4.

60 Jitsuzō Kuwabara, *Shintei tōyōshi kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Kaiseikan, 1911), 4.

61 Jitsuzō Kuwabara, *Chūtō kyōiku tōyōshi kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Kaiseikan, 1916), 171.

62 Ōmori, *Chūtō nihon rekishi zen*, 3.

63 Fukyūsha, *Shōgaku kokushi* (Tokyo: Fukyūsha, 1900), 360. Reprinted in: Tokiomi Kaigo, Arata Naka, and Isao Kishii, ed. *Nihon kyōkasho taikai*. Vol. 9. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1962). All citations to this text refer to the reprint, and the page numbers are according to the reprinted version.

64 Nakamura, *Chūtō nihonshi jyōkyūyō*, 29.

textbooks that imperial loyalty had to be “reawakened” during the late Edo period, this 1921 non-state textbook contended that the Japanese people never abandoned their commitment to the emperor since the concept of imperial rule was embedded in Japan.

Non-state textbooks also became aware of the inherent danger in the term “Southern and Northern Courts” much earlier than state textbooks did. Many textbooks, such as the 1899 Gakkai shishinsha textbook, the 1900 Fukyūsha textbook, and the 1901 Kyōiku dōshikai textbook, used names of famous figures from the Southern Court as chapter titles—the same titles as the 1920 state textbook. These titles avoided the dilemma of undermining *kokutai*, and allied with the tradition of history writing in Japan, which tended to favor the Southern Court starting in the late Edo period because their supporters were seen as the epitome of devotion to the emperor.⁶⁵ Some non-state textbooks did refer to the period as “Southern and Northern Courts,” including the 1901 textbook by Kuwabara Jitsuzō and another textbook published in the same year by Kobayashi Hirosada. Nevertheless, as the other non-state textbooks did, these books still strongly favored the Southern Court by frequently using words such as “rebel” (*zoku* 賊) and “betrayal” (*somuku* 叛く) to describe Ashikaga Takauji and his Northern Court.

Several of the expressions included in the 1920 edition intended to discredit the Northern Court echo rhetorical devices of non-state textbooks published before 1920. The phrase “to avoid the label of a rebel” (*zoku no mei wo saken ga tame ni* 賊の名を避けんが為に), which the 1920 edition used to explain why Takauji installed a new emperor, is an exact replica of Fujita Akira’s writing in his 1915 textbook.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the elaborate eulogies lamenting the death of the Southern court loyalists, a stylistic technique that the state only used for its 1920 edition, resemble the tributes found at the end of Gakkai shishinsha’s 1889 textbook, Fukyūsha’s 1900 textbook, and Kyōiku dōshikai’s 1901 textbook. For example, all three non-state textbooks and the 1920 edition ended the paragraph on Kusunoki Masashige’s death by praising the Kusunoki family for personifying the spirit of loyalty. Though the 1920 edition did not use all of the literary devices of the private scholars, it still assimilated into the greater rhetorical world of non-state textbooks.

For the three features analyzed in this essay, state textbooks departed from the ideological clarity of non-state textbooks in its early editions, but returned to the same trajectory of non-state textbooks in 1920. When references to *kokutai* and its role as the essence of Japan inundated the world of non-state textbooks, state textbooks still grappled with the definition of *kokutai* and continually disproved the theory that Japan had an unbroken imperial line. Eventually the rhetoric and themes of state textbooks began to align with that of non-state textbooks. But even then, non-state textbooks remained the leader of the ideological chorus revering *kokutai* and the emperor. State textbooks thus acted as a less effective indoctrination apparatus than the majority of non-state textbooks. Although the Ministry of Education monopolized history textbook production, it did not monopolize ideological construction since private scholars were actively involved in generating ideas that were more sophisticated than the state’s own ideology.

IV. A Passive State: Understanding the Vague Ideology of Early Textbooks

Several questions arise from the observation that ideological purity and nationalistic intensity of state textbooks paled in comparison to non-state textbooks. Why were non-state textbooks able to express the details of a “Japanese national identity” more successfully than state textbooks?

65 Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945*, 119.

66 Akira Fujita, *Saitei chūtō nihon rekishi* (Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1915), 44.

Why did the state disregard the nationalistic themes and language that were readily available to them? Was not the Japanese state the active engineer of a “Japanese national identity?”

The Ministry of Education was well aware that its goal was to instruct an identity based on the emperor, as the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education proudly announced. However, the Ministry struggled to promote this instruction effectively and the Imperial Rescript offered little advice. The opening of the Rescript proclaimed:

“Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtues; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of our Education.”⁶⁷

The “virtues” included filial piety, respect for the constitution, and advancement of the public good. Although the Rescript did refer to *kokutai* (the official translation translated *kokutai* as “fundamental character”), it neither defined *kokutai*, nor did it stipulate the exact format in which the “firmly implanted virtues” could be observed. The Ministry of Education was capable of approving non-state textbooks that did not blatantly oppose *kokutai*, but when it controlled the authorship of textbooks in 1903, it needed to articulate a detailed ideology—a task that proved to be too overwhelming for the Ministry. The first two state textbooks’ inability to narrate Japanese history according to the unbroken imperial line, and its failure to eloquently explain the “firmly implanted virtues” indicate that the state only had a shallow understanding of *kokutai*.

The Ministry of Education’s inability to instruct proper ideology was not ignored by the public, whose frustration ultimately exploded in the 1911 textbook controversy. In 1911, when the *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper reported that the Ministry of Education used the term “Southern and Northern Courts” (*Nanbokuchō*) in its 1903 and 1909 textbooks, there was an uproar.⁶⁸ Contemporary educators, including authors of non-state textbooks, argued that the term “Southern and Northern Courts” indicated the existence of a time when two equally legitimate imperial courts ruled simultaneously in Japan, which was unacceptable because *kokutai* and the 1889 Constitution declared imperial sovereignty as absolute and indivisible.⁶⁹ Conservatives also believed that the textbooks’ “poisonous” views on the imperial line polluted the minds of the Japanese youth, leading to the Great Treason Incident of 1910, when alleged communists and socialists attempted to assassinate the Meiji Emperor.⁷⁰ Textbooks that did not advocate state doctrine were no longer only incorrect, they were threats that could cultivate treasonous minds. There was vociferous criticism in the press, and the heated public debates and parliamentary confrontation nearly overthrew the Katsura cabinet.⁷¹

After much debate, the government proclaimed the Southern Court as solely legitimate. Several historians, such as Kume Kunitake, Hoshino Hisashi, and Kita Sadakichi, accused the Ministry of Education of distorting the truth, but the government disregarded their opinions.⁷²

67 Horio, *Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan*, 399.

68 Baxter, “Shaping National Historical Consciousness: Japanese History Textbooks in Meiji-Era Elementary Schools,” 329.

69 Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945*, 119.

70 Baxter, “Shaping National Historical Consciousness: Japanese History Textbooks in Meiji-Era Elementary Schools,” 329.

71 Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945*, 120.

72 *Ibid.*, 123.

In December of 1911, the Ministry of Education distributed a teacher's manual addressing the ideological conflict. The introduction of the manual announced that "elementary Japanese history textbooks for children must be taught on the basis of a separately provided list of historical reigns," underlining the imperial timeline as the foundation of Japanese history.⁷³ Due to the limited time, before the "passages that err by treating both courts equally" could be fully revised, teachers were encouraged to use the timeline attached to the manual.⁷⁴ The 1911 imperial timeline only contained names of the Southern emperors (see Appendix A), unlike the imperial timelines of the 1903 and 1909 textbooks which included the names of both the Southern and Northern Court emperors (see Appendix B). In 1912, the Ministry of Education issued a revised edition of the 1909 state textbook, validating the legitimacy of the Southern court by changing the title from "Southern and Northern Courts" to the "Period of the Yoshino Court."⁷⁵

The 1911 textbook controversy shocked the authors of the state textbooks, who began to reexamine their role and to reinterpret the purpose of history in elementary schools. Unwittingly, the Ministry of Education had staffed the Textbook Committee with professors from the Tokyo Imperial University. Though professors at Tokyo Imperial University were civil servants, they were also scholars dedicated to scientific history.⁷⁶ Many of them believed that their pursuit for historical truth and the need to treat history as a form of science based upon observations were more important than supporting the government's myth of an unbroken imperial line. Therefore, when Professor Mikami Sanji and other historians were asked to review the "difficult points" of imperial history to resolve any question surrounding imperial legitimacy, the committee created a chronology that granted equal recognition to both courts.⁷⁷ The Textbook Committee would still be staffed with professors after 1911, but the criticism ignited by the incident taught its members the dichotomy between scholarship and education. Due to the incident, Mikami wrote, he recognized that "history taught in normal education is different from the study of history"⁷⁸ and that historical disputes "should have no bearing whatsoever on history as it is generally taught in the nation's schools."⁷⁹ Likewise, Professor Inoue Tetsujirō admitted that textbooks "must of course be based solely on the foundations provided by our national morality," not historical truth.⁸⁰ The absence of this distinction between scholarship and education prior to 1911 caused the Ministry of Education to produce textbooks that were accurate historically, but ineffective ideologically. Consequently, though teachers' manuals of this period announced that history is taught in schools because "learning the reasons for our unparalleled *kokutai* is especially important to cultivating sincere loyalty and patriotism," prior to 1911 the teachers within the Ministry of Education were more concern with truth than loyalty to the emperor.⁸¹

The changes brought about by the 1911 controversy, both the content of the textbooks and the new understanding of history as a school subject, were not organic. They were forcibly

73 Monbushō, *Shōgaku Nihon Rekishi Kyōkasho Kyōjujyō No Chūi Jikō* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1911), 1.

74 Ibid.

75 Most modern historians do not consider the Southern Court as legitimate. They acknowledge that for six decades two lines of emperors disputed the throne of Japan. Nevertheless, they tend to favor the Northern Court by portraying Go-Daigo's restoration as a failure and stating that by 1338 the only authority in Japan was that of the Ashikaga shogunate. For example, John Whitney Hall, *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times* (Michigan: Center for Japanese Studies, 1991), 104-106.

76 Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945*, 92.

77 Ibid., 127.

78 Mikami Sanji, "Nanboku Seijun Mondai no Yurai," *Taiyō* 17, no. 5, (1 April 1911): 125.

79 Horio, *Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan*, 101.

80 Ibid.

81 Tokyo kōtō shihan gakkō fuzoku shōgakkō, *Shōgakkō kyōju saimoku* (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Tosho, 1907), 549.

implemented by the people who attacked the state for not respecting *kokutai*. On the issue of the Southern and Northern Courts, the Ministry of Education yielded to pressures from journalists and private authors, adopting their version of history as official. This demonstrates that initially, the state did not have a rigid ideology. Rather, it honed its ideology by absorbing the ideas of non-state textbooks. The general trend of changes in state textbooks—earlier state textbooks derailed from the rhetoric of non-state textbooks but returned to it in 1920—reveals that the state’s reliance on non-state textbooks for ideological clarity was not limited to the chapters on the Southern and Northern Courts. Thus not only was the Japanese state baffled by its own vision of “national identity,” the final definition for “national identity” that it produced was not its own original creation. The state frequently turned to private scholars to formulate a convincing and well-defined national identity.

The authors of non-state textbooks are what Gluck calls “*minkan* ideologues.” The word *minkan* (民間) is usually translated as “the people,” therefore *minkan* ideologues literally translates as “ideologues among the people” or “commoner ideologues.” This translation is deceptive for it implies that these ideologues represented the entire Japanese population, when in reality “the people” only refers to the intellectual elites. However, the term *minkan* highlights the common factor that unites these ideologues—they were commoners who never held office in the government, the *min* (民), rather than state officials, the *kan* (官). To better preserve the true meaning of this word, this essay will use the Japanese word *minkan* instead of an English translation. Ignoring the term *minkan* will undermine the implication of the textbook trends, that it was an ideological tug-of-war between the state and a portion of the masses.

Gluck believes that the *minkan* ideologues, a diverse group of scholars ranging from professors to journalists, were characterized by a “highly developed national consciousness” who often berated the government for “insufficient attention to the spiritual well-being of the people.”⁸² The concept of “Japanese state following the people”—even if it was merely following the elites of the people—contradicts the commonly accepted image of an authoritative Japanese state. Nevertheless, it was often through the intellectuals that the people’s demands for a hard-lined policy could be heard. The *minkan* represented *kokutai* as immutable and unique, as opposed to Itō Hirobumi (architect of the Meiji Constitution and first Prime Minister of Japan) who considered *kokutai* as a synonym for “national organization.” Ultimately, it was the *minkan* representation that became the dominant understanding of *kokutai*.⁸³ Furthermore, the *minkan* organization Kōwamondai Dōshi Rengōkai (Joint Council of Fellow Activists on the Peace Question) organized a nationwide anti-peace movement after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty, resolving that the terms “gravely damaged the well-being of His Majesty’s nation” and thereby condemning the policy makers for their “cowardly act.”⁸⁴ The Hibiya Riot, as it is now known, escalated into sheer violence and the state was forced to resort to martial law, the first time martial law was declared as a means to suppress a riot.⁸⁵ The *minkan* ideologues were a formidable force in imperial Japan and their influence extended into all realms of society.

Gluck recognizes that *minkan* ideologues “assumed the lead in interpreting and proliferating the meanings of civil morality” in the early 1890s.⁸⁶ It was they who raised issues

82 Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 10.

83 Ibid., 145.

84 Shumpei Okamoto, “The Emperor and the Crowd: The Historical Significance of the Hibiya Riot,” in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition*, ed. Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 259.

85 Ibid., 260.

86 Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 146.

regarding the curriculum's emphasis on loyalty and patriotism, and it was their ideas that the Ministry of Education institutionalized into schools.⁸⁷ Yet Gluck does not analyze *minkan* influence in education after the 1890s, despite the fact that changes in the textbooks between 1900 and 1926 indicate that *minkan* influence extended into the 1910s. Textbooks written by private scholars had a clearer conception of a "Japanese national identity" earlier on, and their expression of nationalistic ideals was more audacious than what the state had envisioned. Notably, the 1911 textbook controversy was precipitated by newspaper reports, not by censors within the Ministry. The Ministry was not as sensitive to ideological issues as the *minkan* ideologues were. During the incident, *minkan* ideologues also formed an organization that pledged to defend *kokutai* and official recognition of the legitimacy of the Southern Court.⁸⁸ *Minkan* ideologues remained active in the 1910s, continually assuming the lead in reaffirming the integrity of *kokutai* and determining what constituted legitimate knowledge.

Considering the large influence of *minkan* ideologues, it is curious that their interpretation of history did not become the *lingua franca* of state textbooks sooner. The state's initial refusal to follow the lead of the *minkan* ideologues may be due to its fear of "chauvinistic nationalism." Historian Naoko Shimazu notes that the Japanese state yearned to be "included into the elite corps of great powers."⁸⁹ This entailed becoming a "civilized power" with a restrained form of nationalism that would not endanger the social order in place or pressure the state to pursue radical measures. Throughout the Russo-Japanese War, the state suppressed what they deemed to be "radical outbursts of nationalism."⁹⁰ It banned the lantern parades, which were events where local elites—and at times, ordinary people—enjoyed food and other forms of entertainment while playing the national anthem and shouting "*banzai*" at the emperor, army, and navy.⁹¹ Shimazu remarks that the fervor of chauvinists jeopardized the state to the same extent as the anti-war movement did because both countered what the state believed to be "proper patriotic conduct."⁹² The state's worry proved to be justified, for popular nationalism led by the ideologues would deteriorate into uncontrollable chauvinism during the Hibiya Riots.⁹³ Since the first state textbook was issued a year before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the reserved nationalism of the 1903 textbook suggests that this fear of popular nationalism may have been present even before the war began.

The Japanese state was a passive participant in the discourse of Japan's national identity. It had difficulty explaining its own concepts and was careful to not fashion national identity after chauvinistic nationalism. Its passivity contrasted with the *minkan* ideologues, who vigorously generated textbooks with bold nationalistic themes years before their ideas were recognized as official by state textbooks. However, the state's confusion and reluctance did not last. By the publication of the second state textbook in 1909, only residues of the state's ambiguous ideas could be detected. In the third state textbook of 1920, uncertainty and hesitance completely evaporated as the state led the crusade to clearly define Japan's national identity.

87 Ibid., 128.

88 Harry D. Harootunian, "Introduction: A Sense of an Ending and the Problem of Taishō," in *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 25.

89 Naoko Shimazu, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory and the Russo-Japanese War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.

90 Ibid., 44.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 53.

93 Minichiello, *Japan's Competing Modernities*, 4.

V. Ideology as Remedy: Later State-Textbooks and a Clear National Identity

The increased attention to *kokutai* and the emperor in the later editions reflects the state's efforts to integrate radical ideas of non-state textbooks with its own vision of national identity. This was a deliberate decision that would allow the Ministry of Education to assume a more active role in the construction of Japan's national identity. Ironically, the state's decision to be more involved in the creation of an ideological hegemony is a sign of its reactive nature. Against a background of alleged domestic peril and social disorder, the Japanese state scrambled to restore some semblance of order through ideology.

The government issued the second edition of the 1909 textbook, which contained a more sophisticated ideology than the 1903 edition, in the immediate aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, a time of crisis for the Japanese state. The war lasted eighteen months and cost Japan almost one billion dollars, exhausting Japan's financial capabilities.⁹⁴ It bequeathed Japan with such serious socio-economic issues that there were calls for a "second restoration" to resolve them.⁹⁵ The large-scale mobilization of the war awakened "people's realization of their rights toward the state," leading to multiple mass movements.⁹⁶ The failure of one of the biggest mass movements, the Hibiya Riots that aimed to overturn the Portsmouth Treaty, created feelings of disillusionment and suspicion toward the "father-emperor" who had ignored his people.⁹⁷ Confused and exhausted, the Japanese nation "seemingly lost its energy."⁹⁸

The government was understandably concerned. Older statesmen were appalled by the waning loyalty to the emperor and the willingness of young people to indulge themselves in materialistic pursuits.⁹⁹ In 1908, the second cabinet of Prime Minister Katsura Tarō issued the Boshin Rescript. It revealed great anxiety over the present situation:

"Only a short while has passed since the war, and governmental administration is increasingly in need of new vigor and discipline... The heritage of our divine ancestors and the illustrious history of our nation shine like the sun and stars. If our subjects cleave to that tradition and sincerely strive for its perfection, the foundation for national development will largely have been secured."¹⁰⁰

Urging its listeners to "cleave" to traditional values, the Boshin Rescript interpreted the post-Russo-Japanese War period as one of "moral failure." The Katsura cabinet purposely chose the title "Boshin" to refer to the Boshin War of 1868, invoking the spirit of the Meiji Restoration when the nation was seemingly mobilized by its love for the emperor and loyalty to the nation.¹⁰¹ The state identified a waning in people's loyalty to state ideology and it offered a cure—the reaffirmation of

94 Ed Miller, "Japan's Other Victory: Overseas Financing of the War," in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, ed. John Steinberg et al., vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 470.

95 Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 158.

96 Nikolay Ovsyannikov, "The Impact of the War on the Constitutional Government in Japan," in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05: Centennial Perspectives*, ed. Rotem Kowner and Ben-Ami Shillony, vol. 1 (Global Oriental, 2007), 248.

97 Okamoto, "The Emperor and the Crowd: The Historical Significance of the Hibiya Riot," 274.

98 Yoshitake Oka, "Generational Conflict after the Russo-Japanese War," in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition*, ed. Najita Tetsuo and Victor J. Koschmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 214.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 217.

101 Harootunian, "Introduction: A Sense of an Ending and the Problem of Taishō," 4.

Japanese values and the reassertion of traditional Japanese identity. The second edition of state textbooks, issued by the same cabinet that issued the Boshin Rescript, can be seen as one of the mediums selected by the state to circulate that cure.

The Minister of Education who issued the 1909 textbook was Komatsubara Eitarō, a protégé of Yamagata Aritomo (an influential oligarch). In 1910, believing that socialism provoked the social instability that plagued Japan, Yamagata compared socialism to an infection that “must be suppressed and eradicated” through “developing national thought” and through “the diffusion of full and complete national education and the cultivation of moderate thought.”¹⁰² Being a Yamagata-line bureaucrat, Komatsubara implemented policies that reflected Yamagata’s views on education. Consequently, the 1909 edition carefully presented the emperor as the spiritual axis of Japan. It denounced warrior rule as a “perverted system” such that readers would understand that no other form of rule—including socialism and communism—than imperial rule was acceptable in Japan. As the first state textbook to include a catechism, which urged its readers to serve the benevolent emperor and contribute to the glory of the Japanese empire, the 1909 edition highlighted the imperial house as the unifying force of Japan. This was the state’s direct response to the absence of any force of unity in Japan after the Russo-Japanese War. By 1909, the four goals that had dominated Japan since the Meiji Restoration (treaty revision, the Korean problem, constitutional government, and the introduction of Western civilization) had been fulfilled, and the shared enthusiasm that once held Japan together as a nation seemingly evaporated.¹⁰³ With the old unifying force of war and glory now obsolete, the state turned to the emperor in an attempt to present Japan as a country where the “united spirit of loyalty to their lord and love of their country” were admirable.¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately, despite the state’s best efforts to clarify ideology in 1909, by 1920 the “ideological crisis” was still not cured and had perhaps even worsened. The First World War marked Japan’s transformation from a primarily agricultural state to an industrial state, creating new conflicts between the work force and the managerial class, as well as between the urban sector and the rural sector.¹⁰⁵ This led to the rise of a “dispute culture,” as urban laborers and rural tenant farmers fought vigorously for their own demands.¹⁰⁶ An even more vexing development for the state was the rise of various movements. Realizing that “something had gone terribly wrong with the world order,” movements for change engulfed Japan.¹⁰⁷ The Japanese Communist Party was founded in 1922,¹⁰⁸ the universal suffrage movement gained momentum in Japan during this period, and women’s groups pressed for the right to hold regional or local public office.¹⁰⁹ Mass riots also flooded Japan. The most extreme case occurred in 1918, when riots over the rising prices of rice consumed the nation. The government had to send 100,000 troops to quell the protests and Prime Minister Terauchi Masatake resigned due to the incident.¹¹⁰ These developments contributed to the “obsessive fear of these [Japanese] leaders that domestic

102 Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 176–177.

103 Oka, “Generational Conflict after the Russo-Japanese War,” 215.

104 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 732.

105 Marshall, *Learning to Be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education*, 92.

106 Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 332.

107 Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 3.

108 Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, 131.

109 *Ibid.*, 141.

110 Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 47.

society was collapsing,” a fear that historian Andrew Gordon argues led to the reordering of civil society.¹¹¹ Although Gordon mainly explores changes in the political sphere, the heightened tones of nationalism in the textbooks suggest that ideology was also restructured to be clearer, bolder, and more aggressive.

As this period saw the emergence of mass movements and class conflicts, the 1920 edition sought to resolve the issue by declaring that being Japanese entailed only one identity—the identity of an imperial subject. The 1920 textbook moved *kokutai* to the forefront and increased references to the emperor. The Ministry renamed several chapter titles as emperor’s reign names, most notable in a chapter named “Meiji Emperor,” which combined what used to be several small chapters into one big chapter. This further reinforced the idea that Japan’s imperial line is the backbone of the country, and hence an appropriate tool for narrating the country’s history. The 1920 edition also portrayed the Meiji emperor as a wise statesman personally involved in all military and political decisions, a characterization unseen in previous editions. The third edition praised the Emperor for visiting the army headquarter at Hiroshima during the Sino-Japanese War, “graciously experiencing the hardships with soldiers at the frontline,”¹¹² and described how after the Russo-Japanese War he reported the victory to the Sun Goddess at the Ise Grand Shrine.¹¹³ The 1920 edition bestowed upon the emperor a new importance; the country revolved around him, not merely because of his divine heritage, but because he was integral to Japan’s prosperity. Led by a wise emperor, and with their “hearts from high and below united as one,” victory was inevitable.¹¹⁴ Issued during a period in which class became an important unit of distinction, the 1920 edition called for people to unite under their common status as an “imperial subject.”

The Japanese state abandoned its previous passive stance towards identity construction in its 1920 textbook because it felt under siege by its people’s discontent. It perceived the people’s increased detachment from the emperor and the explosion of protests as a moral failure that could only be cured through ideology. It is important to note that many of the mass movements were not actually anti-patriotic, as some workers identified with their respective groups to further national glory.¹¹⁵ Yet the people’s identification with anything other than an “imperial subject” terrified the state. At times the state did surrender to the democratic sentiments of the period, such as passing universal male suffrage in 1925. However, when movements advocated ideas that threatened people’s identity as an imperial subjects, when they called for people to identify with their class or their gender, the state fiercely rejected them. The Taishō period and its movements frightened the state, compelling it to polish its textbooks’ representation of national identity by incorporating the ideologically clear elements of non-state textbooks.

VI. Conclusion: A Reactive Japanese State

The study of elementary school history textbooks reveals that identity construction in imperial Japan was not a top-down process. It was a contest between the Ministry of Education, the *minkan* ideologues who led the war to protect ideological purity, and the masses whose discontent propelled the state to adopt more extreme ideas. The state did not devise a cohesive definition for

111 Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, 10.

112 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 722.

113 *Ibid.*, 726.

114 *Ibid.*, 722.

115 Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, 5.

Japan's national identity immediately, it honed the definition over many years before it eventually adhered to the one promoted by non-state textbooks. Because the government was still unsure of what a "Japanese national identity" should entail and was terrified of chauvinistic nationalism, the first two editions of state textbooks ignored the powerful messages of non-state textbooks. However, as the *minkan* ideologues grew agitated when the social order was disrupted by the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War, the state finally embraced the ideologically pure and aggressive themes of non-state textbooks. Far from being an omnipotent engineer of an all-encompassing "national identity," the Japanese state practiced an ad-hoc and reactive approach towards identity construction.

Though this study based its conclusion on three topics covered in elementary school history textbooks, the tendency for state textbooks to incorporate ideas from non-state textbooks is not limited to these three topics. For example, state textbooks' shifting views on Japan's role in Korea mirrors the changes in their depictions of *kokutai*, warrior rule, and the Southern and Northern Court. The 1909 edition was the first state textbook to use the phrase "Betrayal of the Three Koreas" to retell the moment when the three Koreas left Japanese control in the seventh century, insinuating that Korea rightfully belonged to Japan.¹¹⁶ Variations of the phrase—all with a heavy emphasis on "betrayal"—can be found in earlier non-state textbooks, such as the 1900 textbook by Fukyūsha.¹¹⁷ The 1909 and 1920 editions also filled their chapters on Korea with the term "peace of East Asia" (*tōyō no heiwa* 東洋の平和). The second volume of the 1909 edition¹¹⁸ explained the annexation as a move that will "ensure forever the peace of East Asia,"¹¹⁹ while the 1920 edition promised its readers that "the foundation of the peace of East Asia is finally becoming solidified" due to the annexation.¹²⁰ Once again, the term "peace of East Asia," and the implication that Japan could and would act as the peacekeeper of East Asia, were not invented by the state. As demonstrated in Ōmori's 1904 textbook, early non-state textbooks already hailed Japan as the country that could "preserve the peace of East Asia."¹²¹ As the evolution of the state's portrayal of Japan's regional identity resembles the three topics analyzed by this essay, the reactive nature of the state should not be treated as an anomaly, but as the state's preferred mode of operation.

By representing the Japanese state as passive and disorderly in the realm of identity construction, this study suggests several possibilities that have not been adequately explored by the field. It is conceivable that factional domestic politics contributed to the state's unfocused cultivation of national identity. Perhaps the difference between the Japanese state's post-First World War vision of Japan as a cooperative power, and the textbooks' vision of Japan as an imperialistic and autonomous power, is a sign of the different perceptions of "national identity" that existed in Japan. We may speculate that the alliances between political parties, the army, and the navy were far more complicated than we now understand, since cabinets led by military generals and cabinets led by political parties were equally reactive in terms of textbook policies. With a more complex understanding of imperial Japan, new issues emerge.

Nor are these issues purely historical in nature. The problems generated by textbooks still haunt the Japanese government today. In 2005, the Ministry of Education approved the revised edition of *New History Textbook*, a Japanese history textbook written by the Japanese

116 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi*, 504.

117 Fukyūsha, *Shōgaku kokushi*, 332.

118 The second volume was issued in 1910, the same year as the formal annexation of Korea

119 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku nihon rekishi*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1910), 558.

120 Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku kokushi*, 727.

121 Ōmori, *Chūtō nihon rekishi zen*, 353.

Society for History Textbook Reform.¹²² The *New History Textbook* is characterized by “a statist, at times even militaristic nationalism,” accompanied by a “condescending view of Japan’s East Asian neighbors.”¹²³ News of the approval led to outrage in China, Korea, and even in Japan itself. Although for some scholars the government’s approval of the textbook implies that the “rightist perspective has officially become recognized and endorsed,” it is significant that the government was not the actual author of this textbook.¹²⁴ As was the case almost a century ago, when *minkan* ideologues led the discourse of national identity, the Japanese state in the twenty-first century refuses to take the lead in producing nationalistic rhetoric. This passive and reactive ideological engineer of the early twentieth century did not cease to exist after 1945. Its remnants can still be detected in the textbook controversy today.

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122 Myon-Woo Lee, “Textbook Conflicts and Korea-Japan Relations,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 15, no. 2 (October 1, 2001): 421.

123 Claudia Schneider, “The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (May 1, 2008): 110–111.

124 Lee, “Textbook Conflicts and Korea-Japan Relations,” 428.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A

IMPERIAL TIMELINE OF 1911 TEACHER'S MANUAL

| 四 | | | |
|--------|-----|-------|-----|
| 三條天皇 | 三十一 | 六條天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後一條天皇 | 三十一 | 高倉天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後朱雀天皇 | 三十一 | 安徳天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後冷泉天皇 | 三十一 | 後鳥羽天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後三條天皇 | 三十一 | 土御門天皇 | 三十一 |
| 白河天皇 | 三十一 | 順徳天皇 | 三十一 |
| 堀河天皇 | 三十一 | 仲恭天皇 | 三十一 |
| 鳥羽天皇 | 三十一 | 後堀河天皇 | 三十一 |
| 崇徳天皇 | 三十一 | 四條天皇 | 三十一 |
| 近衛天皇 | 三十一 | 後嵯峨天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後白河天皇 | 三十一 | 後深草天皇 | 三十一 |
| 二條天皇 | 三十一 | 龜山天皇 | 三十一 |
| 五 | | | |
| 後宇多天皇 | 三十一 | 後柏原天皇 | 三十一 |
| 伏見天皇 | 三十一 | 後奈良天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後伏見天皇 | 三十一 | 正親町天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後二條天皇 | 三十一 | 後陽成天皇 | 三十一 |
| 花園天皇 | 三十一 | 後水尾天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後醍醐天皇 | 三十一 | 明正天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後村上天皇 | 三十一 | 後光明天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後龜山天皇 | 三十一 | 後西院天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後小松天皇 | 三十一 | 靈元天皇 | 三十一 |
| 稱光天皇 | 三十一 | 東山天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後花園天皇 | 三十一 | 中御門天皇 | 三十一 |
| 後土御門天皇 | 三十一 | 櫻町天皇 | 三十一 |

Only South

Source: Monbushō. Shōgaku Nihon Rekishi Kyōkasho Kyōjujyō No Chūi Jikō. Tokyo: Monbushō, 1911.

