

Chapter 2

JAPAN: THE EMPIRICAL CONFIRMATION

In chapter one I explained the theoretical framework of the performative identity construction of national identity. The task of this chapter is to present empirical confirmation that supports the theory, paying particular attention to the five themes isolated at the end of chapter one. The central argument of this chapter is that each theme of the theory can be used to explain the artificial nature of Japanese national identity construction in practice. Moreover, I will argue that Butler's and Anderson's theoretical contributions can help us to do so in a particularly integrated and illuminating way. My hope is to show how Japanese national identity has been artificially constructed and manipulated to create the sense of belonging, nationness and the nation state itself.

The first point to be made here is that attempts to unify the Japanese territory are not new. As I show in section one of this chapter, the historical context of Japan has for centuries engaged in attempts at unification. However, until fairly recently, these attempts were made from a purely administrative perspective which fostered unification formally in terms of taxation and security. A more substantive mode of unification which included cultural redefinition and unification of national identity did not begin until the nineteenth century. In section two, I explore several key historical moments of identity formation, following one of the most significant researchers of nationalism in Japan, Tessa Morris-Suzuki. Morris-Suzuki attempts to explain identity formation in Japan through his conceptions of 'primary and secondary nationalism' in a way that shares some parallels with Butler's theory and the additions from Anderson I have

explored. However, I will argue that while Morris-Suzuki's concepts and examples are extremely pertinent, the theory of performative construction of identity I have been discussing seems to better explain Morris-Suzuki's examples than his own theoretical framework. In the third section, I attempt to provide further evidence for this argument. Here I will show that the historical examples provided by Morris-Suzuki can be explained in more depth by using the themes of normative subjectivity, nationness, performativity, repetition and ritual and, finally, representation brought forward from chapter one. To conclude this chapter, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the way in which the Japanese nation state and its unity has been artificially created. In doing so, I hope to reinforce the idea that the theory of performative construction of identity is a most useful explanatory tool that can further our understanding of the formation of nation states.

1. Short history of Japan

This section illustrates relevant aspects of Japanese history for the context of this study. Obviously, I cannot present a deep analysis of the whole history of Japan, since that involves many periods of contrasting differences which are beyond the scope of this study. What concerns my argument is a focus on failed unification attempts in the past and the examples that make evident that there were strong cultural differences within the territory, even during those periods where administrative unification had some success. What I hope to show here is that administrative unification was not completely successful while cultural differences remained so marked.

The land of Japan is a very interesting territory with a long history full of attempts to unify and centralize power. The territory that became Japan was inhabited for the first time 100,000 years ago when it was still geophysically joined to the

continental land of Asia.¹ From that age on, different groups and collectivities began to develop a number of cultures and traditions in the territory which gradually separated into an archipelago of large and small islands.² Many of these small communities made the first gradual steps toward unification in the IV century under the control established by Nara who came from the same family line as the current emperor.³⁴ This territory did not, however, include all the islands that now form the Japanese territory. Moreover, Nara's control was not particularly systematic.⁵ It focused more on extracting tributes and attempts to spread the core ideas of the belief system now known as Shinto, than on constructing a unified political community.⁶

The first serious attempt to administratively unify nearly all of the territories of what we now know as Japan was made in the VII century A.D. by Prince Shootoku.⁷ His territorial claims radically extended Nara's area of influence. The communities and territories were ruled by families and local lords. To extend his control, the Prince decided to put restrictions on the power of such families through the Seventeen Articles Constitution and by strengthening the relation with China.⁸ This attempt failed. However, the extent of the territories Shootoku desired to exercise his influence over had a significant effect on subsequent rulers. Later in the Asuka Period (538 A.D. - 710 A.D.), other princes adopted the same territorial claims as Shootoku. Even though the limits of the Japanese territory were not categorically settled during this period and centralized control and jurisdiction were not fully established, the 'imagined territory' itself became consolidated. The current territories of Japan have not changed

¹ J.E. Kidder, *Ancient Peoples and Places: Japan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 19.

² Kidder, *Ancient Peoples and Places: Japan*, 19.

³ Bito Masahide y Watanabe Akio, *Esbozo cronológico de la historia del Japón* (Tokio: International Society for Educational Information, 1993), 3.

⁴ Antonio García Llansó, *Dai Nipon* (Barcelona: Manuales- Soler, 1988), 139.

⁵ Robert Karl Reischauer, *Early Japanese History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 167.

⁶ Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 169.

⁷ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 4.

⁸ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 6.

significantly since then. They are the same as the territories covered by the ancient desired jurisdiction.

The centralized organization proposed by Prince Shootoku was taken as an example for the political reforms of 645 A.D. known as the Taika Reforms.⁹ These reforms were successful for some time. During 710 the government decided to copy the governmental system of the Xian Dynasty in China, which was highly bureaucratic.¹⁰ This attempt also failed since the kind of centralized control required to make the Xian model function was absent in the Japanese case.¹¹ The imported system did not fit the existing social and political framework(s), which were highly fragmented. It is also important to note that in those times there was no such thing as a unified society or a sense of belonging to a homogenous socio-political group. Allegiance was understood within small communities and power groups only. Centralized administrative control again focused almost exclusively around forcing monetary tributes, and the periodic commandeering of people and resources for defense against invasion from Korea and China. The unification of Japan as an entity was therefore limited to the formal political structure and function of the mode of control dominating the territory. It did not extend to a more substantive unification of the population as 'Japanese'. Wide cultural distinctions remained clearly marked. Neighboring cultures within the territory did not integrate with, and often did not communicate with, each other. Language distinctions remained wide. The only overarching link was the tributes paid to the central authority.

During the Heian Period (794 A.D. - 1192 A.D.) the Chinese system was modified to fit the needs of Japan.¹² The earlier Taika Reforms of 645 were reestablished during this period to unify the territories slightly beyond the formal

⁹Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 6.

¹⁰Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 145.

¹¹Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 145.

¹²Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 45-65.

administrative level. While the imperial elite were only part of the population that established a common culture, the beginnings of cultural cohesion started to become apparent. The Fujiwara clan was outstanding for the implementation of the reforms, including the establishment of common land properties.¹³ However, the cohesion could not reach the provinces that declared themselves as private lands, being outside of the jurisdiction of the central power. Only half of the Japanese provinces were of the Fujiwara power.¹⁴

To protect the private territories, provincial ruling families hired a group of experts in swordsmanship, archery and horse-riding. These developments gave rise to the samurai class who were originally hired by the local ruling families. The samurais, however, ultimately took control over the different territories. From that moment on, the history of Japan is a history of emperors attempting to reduce the power of the provincial samurai, to unify the territory and a history of the attempts of local groups who fought to maintain their autonomy. In the XV century the administrative characteristics of Japan were clearly the ones of a region containing different states.¹⁵ Each local community was organized with its own political, economic and social center. In 1543, for the first time, the land of Japan had contact with Portuguese and Western cultures who brought with them new ideas and new values. Such contact was initially banned for several reasons, the most important being the existing internal instability and fighting between rival family and communal groups. The Portuguese propositions concerning establishing commercial and trade ventures, for example, could not be taken on while internal instability remained.¹⁶

¹³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of Japan* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), 32.

¹⁴ Latourette, *The History of Japan*, 28-35.

¹⁵ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 10.

¹⁶ Latourette, *The History of Japan*, 35.

It was not until the Edo Period (1603 A.D. - 1867 A.D.) that a central government could unify Japan to the extent that it felt secure enough to open the state to foreign relations and give a place in 'society' to samurais and common citizens.¹⁷ Yet Japan was still not unified in its heart. It was recognized that 'Japan' needed to go through a reshaping process to consolidate its meaning as a single territory with a successfully unified political system built upon a reasonably unified social group. Indeed, this recognition is supported by the fact that it was in this period that the name Nihon (Japan) commonly appeared on maps of the area made by the Chinese.¹⁸ The people within the territory also began to commonly refer to it as Nihon in this period.¹⁹

Many efforts were made before, but it was not until the Meiji Era (1868 A.D. – 1912 A.D.) that Japan began the transformation toward the nation state we now know it to be.²⁰ The real changes in social, economic and intellectual conditions during the first decades of the XIX century created a decrease in the power of the central administrative authority and its ability to respond to local social and political forces.²¹ These changes gave more influence to certain communities that were previously excluded from national politics.²² Contact with foreign powers was also of particular importance to the declining rule of the Tokugawa shogunate.²³ After the Tokugawa shogunate eventually lost control, the samurai leaders got together and decided to reinstate a central authority that they could control.²⁴ They declared a child emperor to rule Japan and initiated the Meiji Restoration in which a social sense of belonging and the creation of a nation state

¹⁷ Latourette, *The History of Japan*, 36.

¹⁸ Nobuo Muroga, "Atarashii sekai no ninshiki: Nanban sekaisu byobu" in *Esunishiti to tabunkashugi*, ed. Ryuhei Hatsuse (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1978), 93-102.

¹⁹ Muroga, *Esunishiti to tabunkashugi*, 98.

²⁰ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1967), 76-97.

²¹ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 13.

²² Douglas Gilbert Haring, *Blood on the Rising Sun* (Philadelphia: Macrae-Smith Company, 1943), 21.

²³ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 13.

²⁴ Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan Past and Present* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 82.

could be fostered. It is accurate to say that the Japanese nation state as we know it today began at that moment. The last attempt to unify Japan was successful.²⁵

2. *Key historical moments in Japanese national identity formation*

The difficulty in understanding the Japanese case of formation of the nation state has provoked some scholars, like Tessa Morris-Suzuki, to find systematized ways of explaining and understanding the process. For that reason, Morris-Suzuki separates Japanese history into key historical moments. These, she argues, have two different functions which she distinguishes theoretically. The first is the initial stage in which the sense of ‘nation’ is created. The second is the stage in which the sense of belonging to a ‘nation’ is maintained. The first case is what Morris-Suzuki calls “primary nationalism”.

Primary nationalism is the process of nation-building. The author understands this phenomenon as an initial project to define how the nation should be, its limits and its basic meaning. Morris-Suzuki is implying here that, to a certain point, the creation of a nation is something premeditated. On my reading of this, the idea seems to be that nation-building is first, something that is consciously in the mind of the nation-builders and something that is planned in advance. Morris-Suzuki’s concept of primary nationalism also contains the idea of a project. However, she does not go very far in clarifying just what she means by this. A project can be understood as an activity that is ongoing. It is developed over time rather than completed immediately. In this sense, I wish to argue that a project is something that is engaged and developed. It is also something in which that engagement and development is, to a certain extent, more important than its completion. Moreover, in philosophical discourse, having a project is

²⁵ Masahide and Akio, *Historia del Japón*, 16.

fundamentally connected to a capacity for premeditated planning.²⁶ Projects are not engaged spontaneously. They are rather conceived, planned and revised in a conscious manner. For Morris-Suzuki, the idea of nation-building as a premeditated project building is contrasted with the idea that nation-building is a ‘natural’ step that societies go through in the process of identification.

Morris-Suzuki wrote that the process of primary nationalism can be identified in the Meiji era in Japan. At that time, institutions and a centralized authority had the goal of building clearly demarcated frontiers. It was the action of setting those frontiers that gave a new meaning to the idea of the Japanese state and contributed to the formation of the nation within it. The redefined state encircled a number of zones and groups whose language, culture and history had little in common.²⁷ For Morris-Suzuki, the primary nationalism of Japan was therefore a combination of a number of actions: the definition of the frontiers of Japan, the construction of a meaning of being Japanese and the creation of an idea of Japan as a natural region.

Morris-Suzuki also analyzes what she calls “secondary nationalism”. This idea may be understood as the maintenance of conscious recognition of national identity and reproduction of national ideas.²⁸ Secondary nationalism is more than an act of construction. It is an act, or more precisely acts, of preservation. For Morris-Suzuki this is a second part of the phenomenon of constructing a nation, which can only come after acts of construction. She believes that such actions are repeated to assert and consolidate the identity of a nation. The actions could cover, for example, education, conscription, common ideology and changing concepts of time and space. These are not

²⁶ See, for example, the way that Alasdair MacIntyre derives the concept of a tradition and the notion of an ongoing project in his *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), chapters 1-3.

²⁷ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 11-12.

²⁸ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 11-12.

the ones that create identity, according to Morris-Suzuki, but the ones that protect its permanence.

Without a doubt, theories of the construction of the Japanese nation are of crucial value not only for this study but for the comprehension of different aspects of identity in any culture. Nevertheless, there are some elements of Morris-Suzuki's explanation that contain inconsistencies. She mentions for example that "in secondary nationalism a sense of belonging to a historical nation is already taken for granted and that, therefore an affirmation of the presence of nation's original ancestral culture is not such an important intellectual concern as primary nationalism."²⁹ At the same time, she identifies as part of this process of primary nationalism the moments of assimilation of culture that "transform the texture of daily life."³⁰ Both quotes seem incorrect and inconsistent when analyzed.

The processes of identity have to be, as Butler plausibly claims, actualized and reproduced as reality by the actors by performativity. This means that the primary nationalism to which Morris-Suzuki gives a major attention, is not the most important part of national identity construction, since even if the standards of a culture are officially established, they do not create it until repeated by the population. We can also mention that the assimilation is therefore not complete or assertive, but only a part of the process of performativity. The logics of assimilation also seem to contradict Morris-Suzuki's previous quote. She affirms that those logics are responsible for shaping daily life and a sense of belonging, but such a process is then not consistent with the definition of primary nationalism in which "the historical and official memory of a nation is declared to give identity before its rituals of preservation take part."³¹ In any case, this process of assimilation could be part of what she calls secondary nationalism.

²⁹ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 45.

³⁰ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 25.

³¹ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 45.

This is true especially when it is a way of repetition of the declared standards, a kind of performativity which shapes the daily life of the Japanese and affirms its sense of belonging.

There are other areas where Morris-Suzuki seems to gloss over the more complex aspects of identity construction in the case of Japan too superficially. For example, she gives little attention to the way Japanese identity changed with time and mutated according to the historical needs and moments of transformation of the society. She mentions that Japanese identity changed through the time,³² but she stops short of mentioning how. This explanation was evaded in my view, to avoid undermining his argument of the existence of two unique processes, one that gives a standard (primary nationalism) and another which reproduces it and asserts it (secondary nationalism). In other words, if national identity was not permanent but continuously changing, the process cannot be separated and simplified in two steps as she does. In particular, this can be related back to my earlier comments on the idea of a project being ongoing and interactive. Morris-Suzuki's theoretical observations about primary and secondary nationalism seem to suggest that national identity construction takes two steps that she understands too independently. My argument is that they are both interdependent. They are not so much 'stages' in a process, but inter-related activities that cannot be so sharply categorized.

It is here that perhaps my strongest criticism of Morris-Suzuki becomes evident. His historical analysis of the Japanese case is very complete, reliable and, indeed, has been extremely useful for this thesis. However, if the so-called two stages of nation-building are interdependent and inter-related in the way I have outlined above, it can be argued that the performative theory of identity construction actually better explains the

³² Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 10.

historical processes than Morris-Suzuki's conceptions of nationalism can. It seems that the very same historical 'moments' of importance for identity formation she uses in his writing can be better understood if analyzed using a modified version of Butler's ideas. This is because, as I will now show, the performative theory permits an explanation of Morris-Suzuki's 'moments' in the kind of detail able to capture the process in more depth and complexity than primary and secondary nationalism does. In the following section I will spend some time demonstrating this claim. The central argument I now engage has two parts. The first is that the reality of Japanese nationality and the myths of Japanese homogeneity are clearly constructed artificially. The second argument is that to a large extent this construction correlates with (and thus validates) the various elements of the theory of performative construction of identity I isolated earlier.

The arguments in the next section are intended to further the central argument of this thesis that the Japanese case demonstrates the validity of the theory of performative construction of identity. In short, I wish to show that the Japanese case can be used as a tool to make a case in favor of using a version of Butler's theory in international relations.

3. *Understanding the Japanese case using Butler's theory*

It is widely accepted that the origin of 'Japanese' identity, of 'being Japanese', is fundamentally linked to a '*natural*' ethnicity that coincides with the territorial borders of the Japanese state.³³ Delmer Brown, for example, has characterized Japan as "a 'natural region' whose isolatory and climatic uniformity accounted for the early rise of

³³ See Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1986). See also E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 283 and Nosomu Kawamura, "The Historical Background of Arguments Emphasising the Uniqueness of Japanese Society," in *Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

national consciousness.”³⁴ Others make similar claims focusing on the hermetic nature of Japan’s historical and geographical context. Louis Hayes, for instance, says “the surrounding ocean served as a protective moat, shielding Japan both from invasion and migration, giving to Japan very little infusion of other ethnic groups, resulting in a contemporary population that is fundamentally homogeneous.”³⁵ There is much evidence to suggest that such positions are based on a mistaken account of Japanese reality. This widely-made mistake is rooted in several factors. Three are important for this argument. First, the initial perception of Japan by other countries played a significant role. Second, there is a widespread misperception of the so-called hermetic geographical conditions of Japan. Third, and largely a result of the first two, in the nineteenth century the Japanese state created and disseminated myths of ‘Japanese’ origin for the explicit purpose of artificially establishing a homogenous Japanese identity. The myths were presented to the population as ‘recoveries’ of exceedingly ancient events rather than politically expedient and recent inventions. It will be remembered from chapter one that this artificial establishment of something that is really socially constructed as being ‘natural’ is a foundational argument in Butler’s theory. The parallels with Anderson’s idea of an imagined community based on constructed imagery are also very clear.

When Japan was first recognized as an autonomous political and geographical community, it was generally perceived by western imperial powers such as Portugal to be a highly exotic land with exotic inhabitants.³⁶ While a large variety of ethnicities have in reality always been present within the Japanese territory, to western eyes, all these ethnicities looked so physically different from western appearances that they were

³⁴ Delmer M. Brown, *Nationalism in Japan: An Introductory Historical Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 6-7.

³⁵ Louis D. Hayes, *Introduction to Japanese Politics* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 4-5.

³⁶ See Said, *Orientalism* for more on this idea.

effectively generalized into one perceived homogeneous group. This is clearly inconsistent with the history of the region. It is also counterfactual to view the Japanese people as part of the same ethnic group. Indeed the existence of such cultural homogeneity can be proved wrong just by traveling within Japan and looking at the physical characteristics of the inhabitants. In the south there are clear phenotypical similarities with Filipinos. In Hokkaido at the northern end of Japan, there are strong physical similarities with the Russian population and marked differences with southern Japanese ethnicities. Before becoming the single nation state we now know, Japan was a region formed by several islands, several languages, cultures, tribes and local identifications. Even after the first steps of unification in the early nineteenth century, books written for travelers from different ethnic communities inside Japan warned that they should not laugh at local customs or accents encountered beyond one's local territory.³⁷

Eventually the west began to perceive the existence of a variety of different ethnic communities in other regions such as Africa, differences that existed *within* the more general phenotypical distinctions of mongoloid and negroid et cetera. To a certain extent, this may well have challenged the earlier generalization they made concerning their perception of Japan as ethnically homogenous. However, by that time, the western perception had already influenced the policies of the Japanese state itself toward standardizing Japanese culture within the territory – largely through the creation and dissemination of myths of origin of the ‘Japanese’ identity, which I talk about in some detail a little later in this chapter. Even from this limited and brief analysis, it is possible to see the beginnings of the relevance of the performative theory of identity construction in our understanding of the Japanese case. Indeed, one can say that the process of

³⁷ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 13.

performativity had started and had created a homogenous Japanese subject for the state to represent. This basic point falls largely under at least two of the themes I isolated as central to Butler's theory. First it can be explained by the idea of *representation* which is the effect of institutions producing subjects that they will represent or govern. Second, it set up the basis for the idea of *nationness*, which is the aspect of identity determined by a behavior dependant on our imagination. However, the connections with the theory go much deeper.

In addition to the influence of foreign perception on the Japanese project of inventing a standardizing mythology, as the earlier quotations from Brown and Hayes suggest, the historical geographical reality of Japan has also been taken to be a *naturally* unifying force. Evidence exists to the contrary here. The reality of Japan stems from a longstanding historical connection with, rather than isolation from, the continental part of the region. Japan's official state frontiers were drawn in the middle of the nineteenth century, but were never really closed to external interaction. The kind of hermetic seal implied by Brown's depiction of a 'naturally isolated region' is not altogether the most accurate characterization of Japan's geographical context. As Morris-Suzuki rightly points out, "[t]he 'moat' surrounding Japan is in fact dotted with lines of stepping stones: small islands which have acted as zones of continuous economic and cultural interchange".³⁸ Here the term 'stepping stones' captures the ideas implicit in connectedness rather than separatedness with the continent. Modern frontiers cut across those zones of exchange and also enclosed within the Japanese state a number of groups whose language and history had very little in common. The frontiers were drawn less along the 'natural' divisions between geographical areas and more along the lines that coincided with the community that Prince Shotaku initially 'imagined'.

³⁸ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 10.

The point I wish to make here is that the homogeneity of Japan is not a natural phenomenon, though many respected academics have taken it as such. On the contrary, the homogeneity that now exists in Japan has to a very large extent been consciously and artificially constructed through a variety of government measures. Perhaps the wide acceptance of Japanese homogeneity can itself be understood as a sign that this construction has been particularly successful in the case of Japan. What I wish to point out now is that the theory of performative construction of identity can be extremely useful in helping us to understand just how the government carried out the process of identity construction. It is also useful for showing that the process itself is not as simple as Morris-Suzuki would have it. Rather, the stages in the process are complicated and highly inter-connected, interactively influencing each other at every stage in the ongoing project. For this reason, it is very difficult to study the different 'stages' in strict isolation from each other. The theory of performativity nevertheless makes it possible to focus on certain ongoing themes (as opposed to 'stages') throughout the process of identity construction while never ignoring that the themes themselves affect each other. This, in my opinion, is one of the prime advantages of that theory over the concepts of primary and secondary nationalism offered by Morris-Suzuki. For the theory of performativity not only accepts and makes room for the complexities in the process, it appears to embrace them as an underlying theoretical principle.

Japan is now understood as the land of the Japanese ethnicity, a land of homogeneity and common culture, society and blood. While I have tried to show that this is not a natural fact, but an artificially created construction, that construction is particularly helpful in illustrating the usefulness of many areas of the theory of performative construction of identity to the discipline of international relations. For the Japanese case is one of the best that can provide a clear example of an 'imagined

community' who perform, believe and become through the ongoing process of performativity.

As explained in the previous chapter, the process of performative construction of national identity is an interactive and thus continuous process. I will now present the process as it happened in Japan by means of the theory of performative construction of identity. The explanation will be divided into what I consider to be the major themes of the process: nationness, representation, normative subjectivity, repetition/ritual and finally, performativity as a whole. Yet, it is important to take into consideration throughout this chapter that all these parts interact with each other continuously.

4. *Nationness*

Nationness, as established in the previous chapter and derived from my reading of Benedict Anderson, is based on an expectation of belonging to a determined nation. Nationness is something determined by a behavior dependant on our imagination, in which individuals consider themselves as fellow-members of a nation. The sense of belonging to a nation, and the nation itself, then depends on individual perceptions and the development of a sense of belonging constructed by the conventions and institutions of a society. This process was also explained by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. According to him, in our contemporary world the notion of nation and thus nationality was turned into a universal concept. Therefore people are *expected* to be of a *certain* nationality. This belonging is understood as an objective factor, but it is just an imaginary belonging developed by the conventions of our contemporary world.

As Tokutomi Soho mentioned, it is very evident that in the case of Japan, “the concept ‘foreign nations’ brought forth the concept ‘Japanese nation’.”³⁹ It was not until

³⁹ Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie, *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 16 cited by Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 13.

a more complete relation with other countries was established that Japan came into being as one of the same kind. Japan started its transformation into a nation when it heard about nations and, as in other cases of identity, with the comparison to 'the foreign' (which may be understood as Butler's 'the other'), Japan began to identify and build upon its own characteristics.⁴⁰

For conventions and the limits of the belonging to come into being, the simple comparison with the outside world was not enough. The limits of the territory and the individuals which were members of the same groups needed to be declared officially. Therefore, the official limits and borders were declared and officially announced. This became the first step towards the establishment of Japan as a "natural state", an idea which was later reinforced by official history and myths of origin. This image of a natural region needs to be understood as something essential in the construction of the nation state. That is to say, the importance lay in constructing a unity based on the particularity of its national identity, as a prior entity which grew to become a national body with institutions. Put in Butlerian terms, just like her example of homosexuals, the individuals in the Japanese territory needed to perceive their own form and existence inside the limits of certain existing norms, so later they could be represented by the institutions as part of a kind. This idea was the reason to delimit the borders of the Japanese state.

The idea of a 'natural state' is also a key factor for the construction of a nation. As Anderson mentions, the effects of nationness are based on the influence of different processes on the formation of nations. These processes develop primarily in terms of their impact on the individual and from there on the group psychology. For this to happen, the construction needs a certain legitimacy and that is what the natural

⁴⁰ This idea is very well explained by the Japanese term *kokutai*. Its explanation could be translated as 'the creation of the unique character of one nation as against other nations'. In other words, the birth of the uniqueness depends in many respects upon comparison to other similar ones.

perception gives to the construction. If the state is considered natural, then any type of coercive measure to ensure its limits is considered justifiable. In other words, to set the standards of the identity in the nation, and develop it further than in terms of simple administration, it was necessary to declare the borders of Japan, and construct from them a number of ideas to influence the individual and group psychology of the Japanese.

Before that first complete encounter and relation with the western powers, the word *Wajin* existed. Its meaning had had stronger relations with the significance of political control than with a sense of nationness.⁴¹ The territories of Japan were controlled by several landlords of families, and those under the central power jurisdiction called its inhabitants *Waijin*. The reason for the use of this word was to differentiate those people who had to pay tribute or taxation to the shogun or emperor from those who lived in the private territories or in the far lands out of the power of the mentioned administrations. The same word later became *Nihonjin* or 'Japanese', and acquired a different sense in the understanding of the people.

Until the middle of the eighteen century, most ordinary people in Japan would have had very little cause to reflect on their identity as Japanese.⁴² Once the foreign nations arrived to the Japanese land, their ideas became important to follow a desired path of progress. They came in ships with flags from a defined nation, with an identity and more in common than just a monarch. The outsiders were identified groups, with customs and traditions that according to them were built on the bases of a common origin or blood. Japan became aware of these ideas, and as many of the other formulas borrowed from a superior power, they adopted this new view of themselves, and a new view of the world. For this to happen, a new sense of nationness and the redefinition of

⁴¹ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 13.

⁴² Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 13.

Japanese which included those tribes outside the *Wajin* system, like the Ainu and Okinawans, changed along with the new relation with China and the encounter between the European powers and Japan.⁴³

The previous ideas relative to the world were taken to Japan from the Chinese culture. It was then a concentric representation of the world, *ka-i*, in which barbarism increased the further one moves away from the civilized center. China was the center, and Japan was still considered civilized. But Japan was not the center, and the progress needed Japan to change its position in the world. After the consolidation of the Tokugawa Shogunate,⁴⁴ the elite of power decided to redefine the *ka-i* view of the world making Japan its new center, taking the most important position from China to be substituted by them.

A new idea called Meiji *bunmei* replaced *ka-i*. This new conception was a more dynamic term related to the idea of progress brought by the Europeans, in which the differentiation was not in relation to the center-periphery, but in relation to the degree of assimilation of the Japanese-ness. In short, ideas of belonging were totally relevant to the progress. Those who could be part of the new Japan had to be incorporated and had to assimilate the commonality. For the Japanese, the key of foreign success in the West lay in the cohesion of its members. The Japanese elite probably had a misconception of the reality in Europe of America, but this idea of belonging was the first step toward progress according to the leaders of the new Japan.

Nationness was therefore established in precisely the way that the theory I discussed in chapter one explains. The official limits were declared. Sentiments of belonging and common identity were set up by a redefinition of the Japanese. At the same time, Japan was constructed as the central position of the world. And the idea of

⁴³ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 17.

⁴⁴ Edo Period, 1603.

progress was linked by the degree of assimilation or belonging to Japan. Via policies related to these examples, a new sense of nationness was built and consolidated over time. The Japanese assimilated the culture and new limits and definitions of their existence, and could develop in their imagination the communion needed to create their nation within the existing state.

5. *Representation*

Another theme of the process of performative construction of identity I isolated was that of representation. Representation is the effect of institutions producing subjects that they will represent or govern. It is a process of inclusion by the means of politics.

The world order changed at the Meiji and as Morris-Suzuki states, it produced the idea of Japan as a natural region, the contemporary Japanese idea of *shimagumi* or island country.⁴⁵ But the borders brought a new problem that would eventually bring solution to the dissimilarity. In other words, it was not only necessary to define Japan in a territorial way, it was also imperative to define the meaning of the Japanese as the inhabitants of the territory. It was necessary to set the limits of those that were under the jurisdiction of the government and who were going to be represented by its institutions.

The Japanese State found it indispensable to go through the process that Morris-Suzuki called “cultural colouring in”, in which the State worked to bring together the societies of the periphery into the official image of a unified nation in order to accomplish the desired social uniformity.⁴⁶ Defining this, the subjects of the emperor were also subjects of representation and politics. The new way of belonging went further than the previous way of being part of a certain administration; it became also a production of individuals who were inside the limits of a certain standard: a way and a

⁴⁵ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 25.

⁴⁶ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 24.

kind. These were the first real steps to create the nation state that transformed Japan into a sovereign country, equal to other countries, and with members also equal under the rule of the emperor. It stopped being just a state, with a common government and a defined administration in the classical definition of the term I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Its new goal was to become equal also within the population, and to create a sense of belonging for them to become and create the nation of the Japanese state. We can say that the territorial differentiation with the outside, brought as a consequence internal social ordering, and later, originated commonality.

The process of representation is also in many cases a process of exclusion. According to the theory, it sets the limits of the 'normal', and gives a determined shape to the subjects to be represented by the institutions. For this reason, the territorial differentiation of ancient times helped the new institutions to follow their ideas based on the identification of the acceptable and the unacceptable. The difference within the country contrasted and stressed the differentiation of the Ainu and Okinawa in relation to the urban elite. These regions were not as assimilating of the common culture, and thus considered retrograde. Okinawans and Ainu underwent a process of standardization with the rest of Japan. But it started late and brought about many economic disparities in the region.

In the Japanese case, I would say that discourse also generated the origin of the identity of the national subject. In which case, the encouragement of the government to develop the studies of Japanese genealogy can explain the efforts of the institutions to create and sustain the idea of Japanese as an ethnic group defined by spatial principles,⁴⁷ with the goal of being able to represent them in the form of a national state government. This is exemplified by the support of the Japanese government for Yanagita Kunio, who

⁴⁷ By spatial principles I wish to express that being Japanese was not determined by the phenotypical or biological elements by first instance, but by their existence in a limited and well defined territory, a space in which Japanese are supposed to appear and exist.

through his texts converted Japanese into an ethnonym, studying and concluding that the borders of Japan were also determining of the population by stressing the idea of *shimagumi*, or island country.

The significance of these arguments is that a number of aspects took part in the creation of an image to produce representation. The definition of external borders and the definition of internal standards for the inhabitants of the land of Japan gave the chance for those to be represented. As stated by Butler, representation has the task of asserting the limits of the individual to exist and be able to be represented by institutions. The state, being the central institution to introduce this type of process in Japan, demarcated the origin, territorial location and socially uniform existence of the Japanese subjects. Once those limits were established, the Japanese could belong and be represented by their Emperor, inside the norms and limits already established. Butler thus gives us with her theory benefits in understanding the Japanese process, and the importance of the policies enforced by the creation of the Japaneseness.

As mentioned in the theory outline of chapter one, representation goes further than just a type of political right to the people; it also sets the *image* of those to be represented. In Japan, the only way to be considered part of the progress and part of the nation was redefining the individuals to be so. For this aim, a process of defining normative subjectivity had to take place in the life of the Japanese.

6. Normative subjectivity

Representation also had an effect on setting the new ways of behavior of the national subjects. What we call normative subjectivity then was established. This process, which in Butler's theory is in charge of delimiting the behavior and the further forms of performativity, also took place since the Meiji era, giving a meaning to the ways

Japanese had to act. In other words, for individuals to define their acts and identity, rules and standards of social conventions are necessary. These are located in a number of norms that define the individuals during their life and set the limits of the 'normal'. In Japan, this process took place through the creation of a number of state policies defined as "policies for assimilation".⁴⁸ These had as a main task both the transformation of the texture of the daily life of the people in the established territory and the promotion of a certain shape for an idealized image of the Japanese.

As a part of the logics of assimilation identified by Butler as crucial to identity construction,⁴⁹ we can mention the following aspects: the process of creating the idea of Japanese essence, diminished local autonomy, education, conscription, common ideology, changing concepts of time and space and the processes in which diversity was targeted for elimination by the imposition of language.⁵⁰ Each one of these examples of the logics of assimilation have a direct relation to the process of performativity. All, when repeated and established, build a norm in the existence of the Japanese, and they assert the subject to belong to the ways of Japan and therefore be *a* subject of the Emperor and so on. In the theory, all represent a step toward normalization and standardization of the subjects, constructing through their performance the national identity of the Japanese.

It will be remembered that Anderson argues that one of the major components of the environment in which nations emerged was language. The decline of the usage of the old universal languages and the standardization of certain versions of each vernacular language led to the emergence of larger groups with shared identity on the

⁴⁸ Steve Rabson, "Assimilation Policy in Okinawa: Promotion, Resistance, and 'Reconstruction,'" in *Okinawa Cold War Island*, ed. Chalmers Johnson (San Diego Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999), 138-143. See also Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 25.

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 34.

⁵⁰ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 25.

basis of common language. For Japan, language plays a central role as one of the *sui generis* characteristics of the nation. Speech within that nation constitutes a very crucial element of identity. It works as a vehicle of national thought and sentiment, and like any other language, as the determining factor to understand life. Language is perhaps more emotionally involved in a people's self-perception of their ethnicity than any other cultural artifact. Therefore an official language was established, imposing a change from the regional diversity to a unified Japanese culture. The language, which was taken from a high-class group from Tokyo, became a central element of the assimilation of a common Japanese ideology and a powerful instrument of nation-building.⁵¹ As we have seen, language gives the means of preexisting historical and social conditions that determine consciousness. It influences our conception of reality and, when unified in a population, works as a central tool in the artificial identity creation. "If language is thought, and can be learnt only in a community, it follows that each community has its own mode of thought."⁵²

The local autonomy and the land lords were again attacked by the central authority, this time not only by force but through payments and through the expansion of the ideology of progress. According to the imperial power, it was time to measure up to the standard of the foreign powers. Unification, it claimed, could provide the necessary tools for that. Education was also standardized. The highly centralized system brought compulsory education that included people from all over the corners inside the borders of the state.⁵³ In all the regions a common language from a high Tokyo elite was decided to be implemented in schools.⁵⁴ The dialects were the target of the most severe critics, and those who talked in the streets in their dialect were considered badly

⁵¹ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 28.

⁵² John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 337.

⁵³ Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing Japan*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 78.

educated.⁵⁵ But education went further than establishing the common language. In the schools, the new ways of living were also decided and shown to the Japanese,⁵⁶ a defining image of themselves and their life in the new order of the nation.

But these norms could not only be established or dictated. The inhabitants of early Meiji Japan did not have a good reason to follow the orders of the emperor. The position of the emperor and the nation in their life had still to be determined and developed. As the Japanese state got into its hands the monopoly of the legitimate means of violence⁵⁷ and discrimination, they imposed a new way to point the disparity of the groups within the territory. Scholars from the Meiji Era learned from the West the ideas of ‘civilization’ and applied them to understand and categorize those who were not shaped by the standardization process. The way to convince the population of a change in their daily life texture was also by means of artificially establishing and continually reinforcing progress as an ideal. For this aim, changing concepts of time and space become very important for analyzing the examples in which the ethnic or cultural differences are related to retrograde or against progress, initiating the cultural application of the discrimination policies. In other words, the retrograde groups or individuals changed from being discriminated by the state to a social form of discrimination. In the terms of the performative construction of identity we can say that this discrimination was part of the process of deciding what the limits of the normal were, and those outside those limits were condemned to be discriminated. In the case of Japan, this was very successful in creating national identity. Indeed, because it was so well inserted in the population, what was political became social. Not understanding the links between the political and the social dimensions of identity formation, as Campbell

⁵⁵ Rabson, “Assimilation Policy in Okinawa,” 139.

⁵⁶ Rabson, “Assimilation Policy in Okinawa,” 138-140.

⁵⁷ Which will be remembered from the introduction to this thesis as a key element of Max Weber’s definition of the state.

and Weber appear not to do, means that this crucial point is likely to be missed in such theories. The suggestion is that a theory using performative construction on both political and social levels has the potential to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which the process was carried out. Once the patterns of progress and civilization were learned, the individuals started a process of repetition and internalization of the norms. This, as we have seen from chapter one, is a crucial part of Butler's theory of performative construction of identity and a prime example of how it can be seen in the process of collective identity formation.

7. *Repetition/ritual*

Normative subjectivity went then from the state policies of assimilation into social practices and rituals. Repetition is a part of performativity in which behavior already internalized is performed over and over to assert identity. In the case of Japan, this process took place in part through the recreation of the established dates of memorization of national culture. Dates and ideas of the national culture were positioned in certain places building an environment through spaces, statuary and other mnemonic sites to recall official memory. There are no statues of heroes in the territory of Japan, but there are, for example, stones and yearly rituals to remind the Japanese of a common origin.

To create this sense of belonging in the Japanese, the Meiji imperial power decided to make a record of the imperial genealogies to remember the official history, such as the *Kojiki Record of Ancient Matters* and *Nihon Shoki Chronicles of Japan*. In both documents the official history of Japan was placed next to myths of origin, giving to the inhabitants moments to remember and also a better shape to their identities. Therefore, the repetition was determined by the previous determined policies of the

Meiji state, and of course it underwent some transformations through time which made identity mutate according to the historical needs of the country.

Rituals of Shinto became of very deep importance for Japanese identity creation. In the Meiji era, the governors of Japan decided to reestablish an ancient religion of Japan and made it the state religion. Japanese then were forced to pray and practice in Shinto shrines and so took part in the rebirth of a common ideology via a set of divine ideas. Shinto became very important since it was transformed by the Meiji to be a religion that asserted the link between the Japanese and their territory. Its myths of origin⁵⁸ talked about the gods making both that Japanese land and the Japanese from a common substance, and giving spirit not only to the people in Japan, but also to every stone, tree and piece of land. Probably one of the most important characteristics of Shinto is a ritual or repetition of prayers, in which people pray for their Japanese ancestors. Most importantly, this makes it impossible for any foreigner to become a shintoist, and gives a special divine link to the Japanese with the others before them that were inhabitants of the same (even if newly delimited) land.

8. *Performativity*

As I mentioned before, it is very difficult to categorize each element of history into the themes of performativity. The previous examples were an attempt to exemplify the process of performativity in the context of Japan. Yet, it is imperative to acknowledge that each part can also be transferred and understood in another specific form as part of any other theme of performativity which provides, in my view, additional evidence that the process cannot be fully understood in the two-tiered manner Morris-Suzuki describes. The mentioned examples can be part of a different category among ritual,

⁵⁸ Kosaky Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A sociological enquire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 96.

normative subjectivity or nationalism, and they interact with the others to build what we call performativity. In this way, settling the standards, the official historical background, the limits of those subject to representation and the official policies of a state gave to the inhabitants some patterns to perform. These elements created a spiral of interaction, they went from the institutionalized standardization to something that shaped the everyday life of the people and that was repeated and performed constantly. In other words, the Japanese context and present sense of national unity is based on an idea of Japan as a state of unique homogeneity of race and timeless existence. The reality of its historical construction reveals the existence of previous and ancient cultural and ethnic differences in the diverse regions before the standardization of the Japanese state. The performativity was an instrument that ‘artificially naturalized’ and shaped through the myths and performance of actions a certain identity, in this case the Japanese.

8. *Conclusions*

The theoretical themes and historical examples I have used are clearly of some help in understanding the process by which Japanese identity was formed. We can see that the Meiji Reconstruction was more a construction of the ‘nation state’ itself, understanding that term in the fuller sense I discussed earlier in this thesis. The institutions established official policies that impacted deeply on the minds of individuals and on group psychology. The examples here illustrate how the construction of the nation state was a process in which the identity bonded the dissimilarities and achieved unity. It helped us understand how identity was in Japan an artificial instrument manipulated by the use of a performativity imposed by the institutions of the state. These conjectures enhance our understanding of the Japanese identity, but perhaps as importantly, they function as an

empirical validation of the theory of performative construction of national identity or even of the nation itself.

The five themes of the theory of performative construction of identity are advanced and complex concepts. But despite their difficulty, they give a real scope to the process of identity formation, especially in the case of the national identity construction process. The five main themes (nationness, representation, normative subjectivity, repetition and ritual and, finally, performativity) can help us explain the practice more-fully than other theories have done, since they appear to be more complete and realistic about the complexity of such a process.

The Japanese context and present sense of national unity is based on an idea of Japan as a state of unique homogeneity of race and timeless existence. The reality of the historical construction of this sense of homogeneity shows to us the existence of prior and ancient cultural and ethnic differences in the diverse regions before the standardization of the Japanese state. In that sense, we can say that the analysis of the Japanese nation state can be seen as a step towards developing a theoretical and methodological framework of a larger study about a possibility for the creation of nation states in the contemporary world, and as an instrument to understand other realities that had been naturalized and shaped by the myths and performance of actions with that intention.

A broad recognition of some of the points contained in Butler's theory have been around for some time. Takashi Fujitani, for example, mentions several ideas in the context of nationalism, that I hope to have shown are not only paralleled within Butler's theory, but that are developed systematically and deeply in that theory even though it was not originally intended to be applied to questions of national identity formation.

In contemporary studies it is not unusual for historians and other historically minded analysts of culture to speak of the relatively recent “invention” of some of our most taken-for-granted customs, practices, symbols, ceremonials, and institutions. “Traditional” folk songs, national anthems, national flags, national customs, royalty, and many conventionally accepted practices have come under a new and critical scrutiny... This current focusing on the invented quality of many uncritically accepted traditions, this historicizing of the details of everyday culture, has contributed to a new kind of skepticism about some of our most commonsensical held notions. Not least of these has been the naturalness or timelessness of the nation and of national identity.⁵⁹

So far in this thesis I hope to have shown that these kinds of ideas can be taken to a deeper and more systematic theoretical level by importing a version of Butler’s theory into the field of international relations.

The importance of showing this case as a validation of the performative construction of identity relies on the strength of the arguments that show us how this identity was constructed. Japan is still cited as the most evident example of homogeneity by many scholars due to its success. Nevertheless, some further questions regarding the use of this theory remain. For that reason, the next chapter will deal with some value judgments of the use of the theory of performative construction of national identity. Since the historical examples are useful to show the development of the process, in my perception the current situation of Japan could also illustrate to us the consequences of such practices. For that reason, in the next chapter I discuss the benefits and disadvantages of the use of the practice of performative construction of national identity, and provide an argument that a responsible use could give a positive outcome to re-include previously excluded minorities, and to perhaps play a role in reducing the conflicts of identity that currently threaten our world.

⁵⁹ Takashi Fujitani, “Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering: Toward a Historical Ethnography of the Nation-State,” in *Cultural Nationalism in the East Asia: Representation and Identity*, ed. Harumi Befu (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies University of California, 1993), 77.