Kokugaku and an alternative account of the emergence of nationalism of Japan
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Abstract
Out of concern with the often implicit western-centricity of theorise of nationalism which are currently dominant, the article proposes to shift the focus of analysis onto the working of human agency in our understanding of nations and nationalism. Drawing from the insights from the history of ideas, it argues that, contrary to the modernist account, the rise of nationalism of Japan can be traced back to the rise of Kokugaku in the eighteenth century when westernisation/modernisation had not reached Japan. Kokugaku scholars were engaged with intense collective self-reflection and proposed answers to the question who the Japanese were and what Japan should be without adopting the formula of national imagination generated in the West. The article suggests that focus on human agency has the potential to free inquires into non-western parts of the world from the deeply embedded western-centricity of conventional social theories, thus enriching our understanding of the world.

Introduction
The aim of the article is to present an alternative account of the emergence of nationalism of Japan to the currently dominant modernist one which is, however, not an uncritical rehash of the version put forward by ultra Japanese nationalists. Based on insights from the history of ideas, it argues Kokugaku that emerged in the eighteenth century was one of the first signs of the emergence of nationalism of Japan because it was the first collective self-reflection on who the Japanese were and what Japan should be in the intellectual history of Japan. Conventionally the rise of nationalism of Japan has been located in the latter half of the nineteenth century when Japan experienced a head-on collision with the Westphalian system of the West: an increasing number of request/demand from the European/western powers to establish trade relations, Qing China's defeat at the first Opium War (1839-1842) and the arrival of Commodore Perry's 'black ships' in Edo Bay in 1853 which forced the 'closed' country to open. The standard narrative is that seeing an unprecedented level of threat from the West, some sections of ruling elite, many of whom had been excluded from the then centre of power, the Tokugawa Shogunate, engaged with reforming or modernising the polity in earnest in order to avoid being colonised by western powers and in the process of building Meiji Japan, a modern, westernised and industrial polity, did Japanese nationalism rise as a guiding principle. Since major tenets in nationalist doctrines such as securing state sovereignty and maintaining equality among independent states, which are said to have inspired the *bakumatsu* reformers and Meiji elites, are part and parcel of the Westphalian system, it is logical to locate the origin of Japanese nationalism when the Japanese polity was included in the Westphalian system. The article, however, questions the conventional account which is heavily structure-oriented and proposes an ideational view in which the emergence of nationalism of Japan as an act of collective self-imagination is traced back to the emergence of Kokugaku in the eighteenth century.

Suggesting an alternative account of the rise of nationalism of Japan is at the same time to challenge the dominant view about the origin of nationalism. As I have started to explore elsewhere (Ichijo 2016), the established view is that nationalism was first formed in Europe and spread to the rest of the world as the western way of organising society was accepted as the major principle. Elie Kedourie is most equivocal in this regard (1993: 1):

> [N]ationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. […] Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government. […] These ideas have become firmly naturalized in the political rhetoric of the West which was taken over for the use of the whole world.

The European origin of nationalism is largely taken for granted. A well-known exception among the major theorists of nationalism in this regard is Benedict Anderson (1991) who has suggested nationalism as a form of imagination of a political community first emerged in the colonial Americas and developed by Creole officials. Still, nationalism in Anderson's view is fundamentally European. While nationalism might have first emerged in the Americas, geographically speaking outside Europe, it still emerged under the circumstances conditioned by Europe. Societies in which nationalism first emerged, according to Anderson, were European colonies which were subjected to a more or less identical set of forces including the rise of the modern, administrative state and the development of print capitalism. The American founding fathers, seen as the first most successful propagator of nationalism in Anderson's thesis, were fighting to gain independence from Europe but they were doing so deeply embedded in the economic structure and history of thought of the Old Continent. It is fair to say that the European origin of nationalism is under-challenged orthodoxy in the study of nationalism[i].

Naturally, the question arises: what is wrong with the European origin of nationalism thesis? This may well be an accurate description of a particular social phenomenon called nationalism in the world we have been observing. A quick answer is that because it logically implies that nationalism spreads by diffusion; in other words, nationalism first emerged in Europe has spread to other parts of the world as the West's influence grew. Why, then, could a diffusionist account be problematic? Because it implies a certain understanding, most likely simply taken for granted, of power relationship between the West and the non-West since the eighteenth century in particular. What is being problematised here has been voiced by Partha Chatterjee (1993: 5) in discussing Anderson's modular nationalism: 'If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain "modular" forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?'. Chatterjee objects to the diffusionist account of the spread of nationalism because it theoretically deprives peoples of non-western parts of the world of a space to exercise their subjectivity, to be true subject of history.

So the European origin of nationalism thesis can be challenged because it is, in the final analysis, built on a certain kind of western-centricity or an assumption of western hegemony, which is often observed in social theory in general. Social change, at least in the modern era, means conversion of every part of the world to the models and standards set by the West. Incidentally, this is a concern that has driven Shmuel Eisenstadt to propose the theory of multiple modernities (2000) in which he has tried to overcome the often implicit western-centricity in social theory that arguably prevents us from achieving more accurate understanding of the world.

Inspired by Chatterjee's and Eisenstadt's works, the article examines the experiences of Japan, a non-western country though not a post-colonial one in the literal sense, in order to challenge the

western-centricity of conventional theories of nationalism. It does so by adopting an agency focused definitions of nations and nationalism. A nation is a political community conceived as a self-ruling individual (with its own 'personality'), whose membership is limited. Nationalism refers to a variety of action starting with the act of imagining a nation as described above and other actions that would follow to realise such an imagination. The article first illustrates why this definition would be useful in this inquiry by locating the source of western-centricity of conventional theories of nations and nationalism in their focus on structure and functionalist orientation. It then gives an outline of the conventional explanation of the rise of nationalism of Japan and, by means of history of ideas, examines Kokugaku to argue that it is the first sign of the rise of nationalism in Japan because it was the first act of collective imagining of a collective self, the Japanese nation.

A brief review of conventional theories of nations and nationalism
As many have noted, 1989 appears to mark a threshold in the study of nationalism and by the end of the 1990s, major paradigms in theories of nationalism – modernism, primordialism and ethno-symbolism - were established (Özkirimli 2017; Smith 1998). In the scholarly circle, primordialism, which argues that nations and nationalism are part and parcel of human nature and which has been frequently advocated by nationalists across the world, is treated with a degree of suspicion in the context of rejection of essentialism in social science in general, and often because of its frequent association with some forms of socio-biology (Ichijo and Uzelac, 2005). Ethno-symbolism remains relatively undefined compare to the other two explanations. It is modernism, which argues that nations are created by nationalism, therefore a modern phenomenon, that is by far the dominant paradigm in explaining nations and nationalism. Modernism is so named because of its understanding of nationalism as part of modernisation processes, an epiphenomenon of modernisation in the words of Ernest Gellner (1983).

One of the prominent features of the modernist account of nationalism is that a strong emphasis is placed on structural/functional factors in explaining the rise of nationalism. According to Ernest Gellner (1983), nationalism is a societal response to the shift from agrarian to industrial society. Geller's theory is materialist in that it considers the mode of production as the driver of social change, and in his view, perpetual growth that industrial society is premised upon requires complex and ever-changing division of labour as well as highly mobile labour force. Enhanced mobility of workers leads to egalitarianism which was not observed in a static agrarian society that preceded industrial society as well as universal literacy and homogenisation of language to facilitate communication among mobile workers. This level of standardisation of culture can only be achieved through state-sponsored education, and hence, the idea that the political and national, i.e., cultural units should be congruent is born.

In the Marxist tradition, Eric Hobsbawm (1990) locates the rise of nationalism in a certain phase in capitalist development in which the elite needs to mobilise the masses in order to build a state to carry out advanced economic activities. In other words, nationalism, which is fundamentally irrational according to Hobsbawm, is a by-product of the emergence of bourgeois society, ultimately defined by the logic of development in historical materialism.

Some scholars see the rise of the modern state as a determining factor in explaining the rise of nationalism. In the words of John Breuilly (1982: 1-2): 'nationalism is, above and beyond all else,

about politics, and that politics about power. Power, in the modern world, is primarily about control of the state'. Nationalism is clearly understood as a function of the modern state in this instance, and the modern state is the Westphalian state. According to Anthony Giddens (1985), who sees the rise of the modern, nation-state as a great rupture in modern history, nationalism reinforces the territorial cohesion of the nation-state by facilitating the feeling of identification of those living in a political entity with a set of symbols and beliefs and increases the self-reflexivity of the nation-state. In short, nationalism is an important and necessary accessory for the nation-state to be successful.

Among scholars who place importance on the rise of the modern state in explaining the rise of nationalism, Michael Mann (1992, 1993) offers a more complex and nuanced view. According to Mann, the rise of nations and nationalism cannot be attributed solely to industrialism as Gellner has suggested, or to a certain phase of capitalist development as Marxist scholars would argue though class formation and development are important in the formation of the nation. In fact, he proposes to consider four sources of power in understanding the rise of nations and nationalism: ideological, economic, military and political. In his explanation, the focus is not exclusively placed on structural/functional factors and subjective involvement of actors in the form of the demand for democratisation, for instance, is taken into account.

The above is all too brief a review of major modernist perspectives to nations and nationalism, and given that the modernists reject what they perceive as the essentialist explanation provided by primordialists, their explanation heavily relies on structural/functional factors, which are in turn strongly linked to social change that has taken place in Europe/the West: industrialisation, the development of market-based capitalist economy and the rise of the Westphalian state. This appears to be responsible for the often implicit western-centricity in explaining the rise of nations and nationalism; if nations and nationalism are understood to be a product of certain social change, say, the development of market-based capitalism, it naturally follows that where the same social change has not taken place, nations and nationalism are, theoretically speaking at least, simply impossible. Consequently, nations and nationalism have to spread to the rest of the world packaged with social change that has first taken place in the West: industrialisation, market-based capitalism, the rise of the Westphalian state and so on. Behind the idea of diffusion in the modern period, there is often implicit assumption of western hegemony.

If the implicit western-centricity in the dominant theories of nations and nationalism derives from their strong structural orientation, an obvious way of overcoming this impediment is to shift the focus onto human mind/agency/subjectivity as the capacity to make sense of the world should be universal to human beings. In this regard, Anderson's celebrated definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (1991: 6) would be useful. True, the article has already pointed out the implicit western-centricity in Anderson's thesis in regards to the idea of modular nationalism which represents 'the universal diffusion of nationalist discourse' (Goswami 2002: 309). Still the definition itself has the potential to overcome the problem at hand because of its focus on the act of imagining, the exercise of agency. Chatterjee (1993: 5-6, 26), for instance, who is critical of the diffusionist account, sees the idea of an imagined community useful in capturing how the colonised Indians managed to exercise their subjectivity and agency in the private sphere.

Needless to say agency does not work in a vacuum and is conditioned and facilitated by structural factors. Nevertheless, if the focus is shifted towards the act of imagining, a shared capacity among human beings, the degree to which our understanding is constrained by certain specific experiences could be reduced. There is a further issue in adopting a more agency-oriented, historical investigation: the difficulty in evidencing the exercise of agency/subjectivity. As John Goldthrope (1991) warned a few decades ago, we can only find evidence of past events in what has happened to survive to date, and there is no room for generating new data, which makes historical sociological inquiry a harder job. It is harder but not impossible. Recently, using court circulars, collections of individual writings, diplomatic reports (the production and preservation of all these was supported by the expansion of woodblock printing and a centralising state keen on developing archives) as well as archaeological evidence from contemporary tombs, Nicolas Tackett (2017) has convincingly shown that the ruling elite of Northern Song in the eleventh century had what can only be understood as national consciousness which was radically different from the universalistic self-understanding as a civilised empire of the Tang era. China was imagined as a more particularistic manner – a homogeneous, ethno-cultural ('Han' as opposed to 'Hua') polity with individuality and which needs to be governed by 'one of us': a totalising conception of political community as Prasenjit Duara (1995) has put it.

Tackett (2017), however, refrains from claiming that the origin of Chinese nationalism is traced back to the eleventh century; rather he adopts an ethno-symbolist approach to suggest this piece of imagination has served as a building block of Chinese nationalism in the modern period. The main reasons are the imagining of eleventh-century Northern Song was not a mass phenomenon and that it was not linked to democracy. It appears Tackett subscribes to the conventional definition of nations and nationalism which emphasises the linkage with a set of social change that is peculiar to the West. This article which adopts a more agency focused understanding, on the other hand, would argue that it was the first expression of nationalism of China, which would then open up new lines of inquiry into nations and nationalism. In what follows, the article examines Kokugaku to argue that the rise of nationalism of Japan can be traced back to the eighteenth century and outlines what new suggestion it could bring to the study of nations and nationalism.

The conventional account of the rise of Japanese nationalism
There are not many works which review cases of nationalism in the world. These rather rare major works often classify the Japanese case as reformist (Breuilly 1982: ch. 9) or restorative (Kedourie 1970). Nationalism of Japan is typically described as a reaction against the perceived threat from western powers. In Breuilly's view, the contacts with the West triggered 'the desire to reform indigenous society along modern lines; to reject various economic controls and western pretensions to cultural superiority; and to link both a reformed and independent state and society to a sense of national identity' (Brueilly 1982: 195). Kedourie also takes that view that 'a sense of nationalism' was aroused in Asia and Africa including Japan because of the perception that traditional society which had been 'battered and pulverized by Europe' had to be transformed 'into something solid and powerful' by appealing to history (1970: 66). Since these accounts firmly links the origin of nationalism of Japan with a clear recognition of the threat or possibility of western domination, it cannot be located before the nineteenth century when Tokugawa Shogunate started to face tangible threats from the West. The function of nationalism of Japan was to modernise the Japanese polity

and society and to adapt to the Westphalian system discarding the Sino-centric order which prevailed in East Asia for centuries in order to resist western hegemony.

What is more, the Japanese case is 'the most successful adaptation of nationalist values to a non-western state' (Breuilly 1982: 196). So much so, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan won the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) on the back of fruits of their modernisation/industrialisation which started in earnest following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and became, momentarily at least, a flag bearer for the liberation of non-western parts of the world (Aydin 2007). In this sense, the Japanese case represents a textbook diffusion of nationalism packaged with westernisation.

In the conventional account of the rise of nationalism, which is framed in the diffusionist account, 'Japan' and 'the Japanese' were created by the contact with the West. In fact, Kevin Doak (2012: 36) asserts 'Prior to 1853 [Commodore Perry's arrival in Edo Bay], there was no Japan'. The conventional explanation of the rise of nationalism of Japan is that prior to the full-blown encounter with the West in the nineteenth century, there was a pre-modern polity and society in the islands that now constitute Japan. Tokugawa Shogunate, instituted in 1603, was 'efficient' (Seaton-Watson 1977: 286) in running the territory under its control in a kind of feudal manner but without any police force, centralised treasury, centralised code of law or centralised concern on schooling and health (Jansen 2000: 60). While commercial capital was well developed by the end of the seventeenth century (with a version of futures market for rice established by the eighteenth century), officially cut-off from the rest of the world, the way Japanese economy was expanding did not follow what historical materialism predicted. Urban based mass culture started to develop, but on the whole, modernists would argue that due to the absence of structural factors that should underpin nationalism in Tokugawa Japan, there was no nationalism as an organising principle of society.

The origin of nationalism of Japan is usually traced back to the increasingly intensifying encounter with the West from the end of the eighteenth century. Russians started to appear at Japan's northern border in the 1790s and in 1804 Nikolai Rezanove, carrying the letter from Alexander I asking to establish a trading relationship, arrived in Nagasaki. The Russian request was refused but both Russian and British ships started to appear to demand provisions or to establish commercial relationship. In 1825, the Shogunate issued an order to drive away foreign ships. The news of the First Opium War reached Japan when one of the major reforms by the Shogunate (the Tempō reforms, 1841-43) in response to domestic and foreign crises was being undertaken. The Shogunate repealed the order to drive foreign ships away in 1842. In the meantime, fierce debates as to what policy to be pursued – to maintain the isolationist policy or to open up the county – raged in the Shogunate. Conventionally, the origin of nationalism of Japan is located in this period when heated exchange over the direction and defence of 'Japan' was made among political elite. The arrival of Commodore Perry in Edo Bay in 1853 is seen as epoch making since this led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Kanagawa of 1854, Japan's first treaty with the West, which allowed the US ships to use the designated ports in Japan. This was followed by a series of treaties with the US, Russia, Britain, France and the Netherland establishing trading relationship with the West. The tension between the isolationists and those supporting the opening-up of the country was intertwined with the questioning of the legitimacy of Tokugawa Shogunate, and after a brief period of civil war, the last Shogun resigned from his office in 1867 and imperial rule was restored in 1868 (Jansen 2000).

The story of Japan since Meiji Restoration of 1868 is well-known. Convinced that the only option was to catch up with the West, the Meiji government single-mindedly embarked on programmes of modernisation/westernisation. The equality of people of Japan was one of the five principles to be proclaimed by the Emperor in 1868. The feudal system of Tokugawa Japan was rapidly dismantled to produce a more centralised form of governance; a large mission was sent to the US and then to Europe to study constitutionalism and other features of the 'advanced' West; the first constitution of Japan was proclaimed in 1889 and the first parliament met in 1890. Under the slogan of 'Fukoku Kyōhei (Enriching the Country, Strengthening the Military)' and 'Shokusan Kōgyō (the promotion of new industry)', the Meiji government introduced conscription and compulsory schooling, and helped kick-start industrialisation in Japan. With all trappings of a modern state – a centralised government, conscription, compulsory education – as well as rapidly developing economy, by the end of the nineteenth century, 'there could be no doubt that the Japanese were a nation, and Japan was not only a sovereign state but a national state' (Seaton-Watson 1977: 290).

The above is a brief outline of the conventional explanation of the rise of nationalism of Japan which is firmly embedded in the diffusionist framework that nationalism spreads with westernisation/modernisation. However, as we shall explore below, this cannot account for more subjective phenomena including the expression of national consciousness observed in Japan before the full-blown encounter with the West such as the rise of Kokugaku. A shift of emphasis onto agency in understanding nations and nationalism could provide a better explanation in this regard. Below, we explore the rise of Kokugaku as one of the first signs of the rise of nationalism in Japan.

Kokugaku: one of the first forms of collective self-reflection/national imagining in Japan

Kokugaku (国学) is probably best-known as a source of particular aspects of Japanese nationalism which culminated in Japan's invasion of China (the beginning of which was marked by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937) and the Pacific War (1941-1945), among other things. Maruyama Masao, the heavy weight of post-war liberal political theory in Japan, traced some characteristics of pre-war Japanese society to the ideas proposed by Kokugaku scholars, in particular to those by Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), and identified Kokugaku as one of the causes of hindering development in critical thinking in post-Meiji Japan, which, according to him, paved the way to the so-called Fifteen Years War (1931-1945) (Maruyama 1952=1974). More recently, Peter Nosco has noted that because some prominent aspects of the prevailing ideology of pre-war and wartime Japanese society such as 'revere the emperor (sonnō)' and 'expel the barbarian (jōi)' were understood to have stemmed from the Kokugaku tradition of Tokugawa era, Kokugaku was almost a taboo subject in post-war scholarship (Nosco 1990: ix-xiv). Kokugaku, therefore, is known, first and foremost, as the source of 'bad' nationalism of post-Meiji Japan in the study of nationalism; 'bad' because of the aggressive, imperialistic, expansionist, irrational and militaristic nature of nationalism that characterised Japanese society, at least, up to 1945. It is also bad because this version of nationalism did not contribute to the establishment of mature democracy due to Kokugaku's emphasis on irrationality. More recently, a more benign aspect of Kokugaku that is reflected in nationalism of Japan has been identified. For example, in examining the genealogy of the *nihonjinron*, the discussions of the Japanese, Kosaku Yoshino has traced the idea of Japanese uniqueness to Kokugaku (Yoshino 1992: 46-53). These concerns are, however, outside the immediate scope of the article.

Kokugaku is also known as the nativist or National Learning school. There is some disagreement as to what this school of learning should be addressed[ii]. Harry Harootunian (1988) has characterised it as nativism, an interpretation which Nosco (1990) has adopted but is questioned by John Breen (2000), Mark Teeuwen (2006) and Susan Burns (2003) among others. Thomas McNally (2016) categorically rejects the label of nativism, which he considers as externally imposed upon Kokugaku, and argues that Kokugaku should be understood as a form of exceptionalism. Johann Arnason (1997: 342) observes that Kokugaku is 'an exceptionally instructive example of the differences as well as the connections between nativism and nationalism' without presenting a clear conclusion. Randal Collins (1998: ch. 7), on the other hand, see a clear parallel, first, between the rise of neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan and the Enlightenment in Western Europe, and then, between the rise of Kokugaku and Romanticism from a view point of sociology of knowledge. The fact that Motoori Norinaga, the major figure in the Kokugaku movement, did not use the term Kokugaku but simply defined his work as 'the study of the old way' is suggestive in pondering the nature of different epistemologies that existed in the world (Muraoka 2006)[iii]. Coming to a definite conclusion as to what is the most appropriate label for this school of learning is beyond the scope of the current article and the term Kokugaku is used throughout. The basic understanding in this article is that Kokugaku is a school of learning which rose in eighteenth-century Japan and which focuses on the study of Japanese old writings such as *Man'yōshū* (*Ten Thousands Leaves*, an anthology of poetry, complied in late eighth century) and *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, compiled in 712) instead of Chinese classics or Buddhist texts which had been the standard subject of study in Japan. Kokugaku has been evolving up to the present and multiple phases are identified. This article, however, restricts its investigation to the initial phase which is widely acknowledge to have culminated in Norinaga's work in the latter half of eighteenth century and does not consider later phases driven by Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) or any post-Meiji figures such as Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962), Origuchi Shinobu (1887-1953) and the Japan Romantic School[iv].

The initial phase of Kokugaku, the eighteenth-century version of Kokugaku, was far from being monolithic; some scholars studied poetry, some examined old texts with a philological approach; some were more interested in asserting a normative framework that was perceived to emerge from the old texts while others were more concerned with what can be described as evidential scholarship (see, for instance, Ookubo 1963; Endo 1998=2003; Wachutka 2013). While Kokugaku of eighteenth-century Japan was by no means homogeneous, it can still be described as 'the study of the traditions, institutions and literature of Japan prior to the advent of foreign influences' (Endo, 1998=2003: 147). While Kokugaku was a 'broad church' encompassing heterogeneous endeavours, giving it a single label is justified because it had a very clear 'the other': Kangaku (漢学), the study of Chinese classics including Buddhist sutras and Confucian texts. In short, Kokugaku was 'an attempt to study Japanese antiquity' so as to 'apply its lessons in the rectification of an epoch that many believed was mired in decline' (McNally 2005: 1).

Under Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867), Confucianism was the 'established' academic discipline enjoying the Shogunate's patronage. The Shogunate specifically designated a school of neo-Confucianism called Cheng-Zhu school which incorporated metaphysical elements in traditional Confucianism in response to the rise of Buddhism and Taoism, as the official discipline. In Cheng-Zhu

school of neo-Confucianism, the way of the heaven was thought to be expressed in the universal principles, *li* (理), working in conjunction with matter, *qi* (気). The ideal state of being is when *li* and *qi* are in harmony. In this school of thought, at least as developed in Tokugawa Japan, the way in which social and political order was realised was the major focus of scholarly endeavour, and such enquires were carried out as a close reading and examination of Chinese Confucian texts. The prevailing intellectual climate in the eighteenth century can therefore be described as more universalistic than particularistic in that the mainstream intellectuals were mainly concerned with exploration of universal principles and their manifestation in social life (Maeda 2009).

Kokugaku which concentrated on exploring 'what is Japan?' in this intellectual climate was a radical movement challenging the established way of thinking (Maeda 2009). Kokugaku scholars studied Japanese ancient texts such as *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū* so as to uncover the uncontaminated 'essence' of Japaneseness. These texts were thought to be an ideal material for the efforts to recover the past because they were written before foreign influences, i.e., Buddhism and Confucianism, firmly established themselves in Japan. The irony is that these texts were written using Chinese characters because the Japanese language did not have its own writing system when these words were committed to paper. The task of Kokugaku scholars was therefore philological in the first place: to remove the layers of foreign influences from these texts by conducting close and careful reading of them in order to unearth the true, original meanings. Based on these painstaking endeavours, Kokugaku scholars argued that Japan in antiquity was a country where perfection in every respect of life – human behaviour, governance, order - was realised naturally through the 'true heart'. Human beings were simply good and life was effortlessly harmonious because the ancient ways of Japan, the expression of the true heart, prevailed (Harootunian 1998; Nosco 1990; Burns 2003; Endo 1998=2003). This state of bliss was lost because of contamination by foreign ways which obscured the true heart, according to Kokugaku scholars, but it was still possible to recover and regain the true heart and therefore to bring back the original, pristine conditions enjoyed by the ancient Japanese.

Kokugaku was clearly a reform movement which was driven by endogenous forces. Because of Rangaku (蘭学), Dutch Learning, a study of texts written mainly in Dutch because the Dutch East Indian Company was the only European entity authorised to trade with Tokugawa Japan, Kokugaku scholars of the time was aware and made use of western knowledge in regards to astronomy, Christianity and global geography and in this respect, Kokugaku scholars were not completely cut-off from scholarship of the West (Maeda 2006)[v]. Still, scholars agree that Kokugaku's intellectual lineage owes to certain developments in the study of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan, especially to the works by Ogyū Sorai (1666-1725) who advocated the 'ancient learning' approach by going back to the ancient Confucian texts rather than relying on commentaries produced later years especially during the Song dynasty (Harootunian 1970; Burns 2003; Nosco 1990; Ookubo 1963; Katanuma 1984; Endo 1998=2003; Maeda 2009). Sorai's endeavour formed part of East Asian responses to a major crisis in Confucianism: the establishment of Manchu rule over China proper in 1644. The barbarian's takeover of an empire underpinned by Confucianism, as it were, was widely interpreted by Confucian scholars in China, Korea and Japan as an indication of grave moral failing on the part of the Ming rulers. In order to identify the moral cause of the Ming's demise and how to avoid the same fate, Confucian scholars across eighteenth-century East Asia were eagerly engaged with re-

reading of classical Confucian texts to advise the contemporary government (Huang 2013; Katsurajima 2008). The impetus to go back to the ancient and original texts, one of the major features of Kokugaku, was therefore shared with the established discipline, Confucianism, and this drive is understood to have come from critical reflection which Tokugawa intellectuals conducted on social and economic problems of eighteenth-century Japan within an East Asian context of heightened alertness towards the legitimacy of contemporary rulers.

Sorai was clearly a Confucian scholar and as such cannot be regarded as the founding father of Kokugaku. The honour customarily goes to Keichū (1640-1701), a Buddhist monk who specialised in the study of Japanese poems called *waka* (Muraoka 2006; Endo 1998=2003). Keichū was commissioned by Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1701), one of the most powerful and prominent retainers and a blood relation of the contemporary shogun, to prepare thorough commentary on *Man'yōshū*. Keichū argued in his commentary published between 1687 and 1690 that poems contained in *Man'yōshū* should be interpreted in reference to the ancient thinking of the Japanese, not to the dominant Confucian framework of the Tokugawa era, because ancient Japanese understood the world differently. He also suggested that the language the ancient Japanese used was aesthetically superior to the one used by his contemporary because of its pristine condition (Burns 2003; Nosco 1990). Keichū's work is seen as the very first, critical and empirical study of *Man'yōshū* which was conducted by applying the technique to read the Buddhist text (Endo 1998=2003). Some of the key charac234istics that bind various strands of Kokugaku were spelt out in his work: the critical approach to the text, the ideas that the ancient Japanese lived in a different world from that of Confucianism and that the language was the key to uncovering the ancient truth.

Keichū's suggestions were then taken up by Kada no Azumamaro (1669-1736) and Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769) (Muraoka 2006). Azumamaro was from a scholarly family, unlike Mabuchi or Norinaga, and is credited to have helped establish Kokugaku as a distinct discipline (Nosco 1990: ch. 4). He articulated the distinctiveness of Kokugaku in terms of its adversarial relationship with Confucianism and Buddhism and allegedly petitioned the government to set up a network of schools to study things Japanese (Endo 1998=2003: 150). His achievement is noted more in the administrative sphere – institutionalising Kokugaku - than in the academic area; he is not known for a particular piece of work unlike Keichū, Mabuchi or Norinaga. Nevertheless, Azumamaro is also credited to have contributed to the birth of a new form of Shintō called 'restoration Shintō', which was to be further developed by Hirata Atsutane in the nineteenth century and became associated with nationalism of pre-war and wartime Japan.

Mabuchi, on the other hand, is better known for his academic achievement and for developing a more focused critique of neo-Confucianism. Mabuchi also studied *Man'yōshū* and focused on the language. What he added was the view that the superiority of the ancient Japanese language, whose sounds directly derived from the nature, was lost due to corruption introduced by the Chinese language which was 'unnatural' in the Japanese context. Because of the introduction of Chinese characters, the unity of human beings, the nature and the sound that had enabled the ancient Japanese to experience and perceive their surroundings directly and naturally (therefore correctly) was lost, according to Mabuchi. Because this unity was disrupted, there were now abundant social ills. In order to combat this deplorable situation, Mabuchi maintained, the contemporary Japanese had to master the original language as appeared in *Man'yōshū* and to retrieve the true heart that

had supported the ancient idyllic existence (Burns 2003; Nosco 1990 ch. 5). Mabuchi found the essence of language in its sound and treated writing with suspicion although pieces of writing in Chinese characters were the only way to rediscover the idyllic past, the true way. Mabuchi's aversion to writing was shared with Norinaga who regarded written script as falsehood, a hindrance in receiving benefits of the workings of the spirit of the language. There is some similarity between Mabuchi's and Norinaga's idealisation of an illiterate state of society and the twentieth-century anthropologists' appreciation of 'primitive society' (Murai 1989).

Motorori Norinaga, probably the best known scholar of Kokugaku, pursued the exploration of the spirit of Japanese antiquity with *Kojiki* rather than with *Man'yōshū* and after establishing the natural spontaneity of feelings and spirits as one of the major features of the divine age, turned his attention to the *Tale of Genji* to suggest that *mono no aware* (the movement of the heart as it feels) as the essence of Japanese literature (Endo 1998=2003: 152). Norinaga regarded *Kojiki* as a more authentic narrative of the divine age than *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*, complied in 720), and argued *Kojiki* revealed there was a particularly Japanese way of existence in the ancient times. This was the time of harmony and bliss because of the working of the true heart that assured the unity of human beings, their surroundings and deities. However, this paradise was lost because of the influence of the Chinese mind, different epistemology represented by Buddhism and Confucianism as well as the Chinese language. In his view, because the Chinese mind had obscured the true heart with which the ancient Japanese were endowed, social relations had become 'unnatural' and led to a range of social and political strife he was witnessing. In order to overcome the contemporary problems, Norinaga advocated restoring the true heart by removing the contaminating influence of the Chinese mind (Nosco 1990; Burns 2003; Harootunian 1970, 1998).

With Norinaga, the fuzzy contour of Kokugaku, this heterogeneous school of thought, is said to have been drawn. Kokugaku is a study of ancient Japanese texts to rediscover the truth of life which the ancient Japanese knew. It is a quest for authentic 'Japaneseness', for the ideal state of being which the Japanese once enjoyed and which was subsequently obscured by foreign influences. It was partly philology, partly ancient studies; it was at the same time studies of literature, history, ethics and beliefs. Kokugaku, a radical intellectual movement supported by the general expansion of basic education as well as certain technological advances such as woodblock printing, achieved some popularity. Mabuchi said to have some 430 followers or pupils; by the time of his death, Norinaga said to have some 500 followers in total (Burns 2003: 2). Supporters of Kokugaku at this point were mainly commoners – merchants and rich farmers. In the nineteenth century, Hirata Atsutane became the driving force behind the further popularisation of Kokugaku, which became influential in some sections of samurai class with its emphasis on emperor worship and the isolationist outlook to the world (Hansen 2006; Maeda 2009).

This all too brief discussion of the rise of Kokugaku has, nevertheless, shown that it was an intensive exercise of self-reflexivity with the Japanese nation at its centre. In other words, the rise of Kokugaku is a good fit for the reformulated understanding of nationalism as proposed in this article: it is a collective act of imagining a polity with its own personality, as limited and self-governing.

The similarities between *Kokugaku* and Romanticism

In investigating whether the rise of Kokugaku is one of the first instances of Japanese nationalism, it is helpful to seek similarities between it and Romanticism. Since the linkage between Romanticism and nationalism is clearly established, it follows if a degree of equivalence between Kokugaku and Romanticism is found, it would support the article's argument. Seeing some parallels between Kokugaku and Romanticism is not uncommon. In Japanese scholarship, for example, Maruyama (1952=1974) sees Kokugaku as an attempt to liberate inner nature and to legitimise the aesthetic attitudes to the world, thus, alluding to similarities between Kokugaku and Romanticism. Muraoka (2006: 10-17) is unequivocal in identifying Norinaga's endeavour as work in philology or ancient studies and finds commonalities between Norinaga's work and that by August Böckh (1785-1867), a German classicist and antiquarian, one of the implications of which is the possible parallel between Kokugaku and Romanticism[vi].

Romanticism is typically described as an intellectual attitude or orientation that conditioned a range of works of art – literature, painting, music, architecture and so on – which were produced from the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century and it is widely understood to be a reaction against the emphasis on rationality introduced by the Enlightenment and propagated through Classicism and Neoclassicism (Leerssen 2006a: 111). Romanticism is one of the major developments in history of thoughts and has been described as 'a gigantic and radical transformation, after which nothing was ever the same' (Berlin 1999: 5). In the words of Hans Kohn (1950: 443), Romanticism was:

> … an interpretation of life, nature and history — and this philosophic character distinguished it from romanticism in other lands. It was sharply opposed to the rationalism of the eighteenth century; it mobilized the fascination of the past to fight against the principles of 1789.

Romanticism's relationship with nationalism has been extensively explored. In particular, the firm intertwining of German Romanticism and German nationalism is one of the established facts in the study of nationalism (Smith 1983: ch. 1; Kedourie 1993). Isaiah Berlin (1999: 38), for instance, is equivocal that Romanticism was born in Germany, not in England or France and argues that 'the whole thing is a product of wounded national sensibility, of dreadful national humiliation, that this is the root of the romantic movement on the part of the Germans'. In other words, Romanticism and German nationalism are two sides of the same coin. More generally, Joep Leerssen emphasises the concurrence of nationalism and Romanticism in nineteenth-century Europe and argues that both were pan-European phenomena and the two are linked by the 'cultivation of culture' (Leerssen 2006a, 2006b; Brinker et al. 2013: 427).

The parallels between Kokugaku and Romanticism can be drawn in two ways. The first is the intellectual content of Kokugaku and Romanticism. Kohn has described a newly emerging romantic individual as 'regarded himself not as a representative of the universal order, but as unique, rejecting limits imposed by measure or society and demanding full freedom for his creative genius' (Kohn 1950: 443-4). Berlin (1999: 7-14) has highlighted 'the sense of uniqueness, the profound emotional introspection, the sense of the differences of things, dissimilarities rather than similarities', 'wholeheartedness, sincerity, purity of soul, the ability and readiness to dedicate yourself to your ideal, no matter what it was' and 'a great turning towards emotionalism, that there was a sudden interest in the primitive and the remote – the remote in time, and the remote in place

– that there was an outbreak of craving for the infinite' as aspects of Romanticism. As McNally (2016) has forcefully argued, the major tenet in Kokugaku is to assert that Japan is exceptional and unique. Japanese uniqueness is articulated in opposition to Confucianism in the form of Chinese centrism and the emphasis is placed on the importance of authentic feeling/emotion (Katsurajima 2008). In other words, 'the close link between aesthetic and religious elements in the nativist image of Japanese antiquity and the transposition of political themes into the aesthetic sphere are reminiscent of well-known currents in Western culture' (Arnason 1997: 343). Since the idea of a political community with distinct individuality is the basis of a nationalist worldview, what eighteenth-century Kokugaku scholars put forward was a nationalist form of imagination.

Another way of drawing a parallel between Kokugaku and Romanticism is to focus on how these ideas were developed and spread in what context; a sociology of knowledge approach. Randal Collins (1998: ch. 7) has carried out an extensive and comprehensive study of what he referred to as sociology of philosophies and examined the ways in which intellectual life in Tokugawa Japan developed. Collins sees a parallel between intellectual life in Tokugawa Japan and that in contemporary Western Europe in terms of overall structural conditions; secularisation, increasing market competition in education and mass cultural production, for instance. He emphasises the significance the gradual secularisation and general expansion of education in the Edo period had on the development of various philosophies, which, according to Collins, bore much similarity to the contemporary development in Western Europe: 'By the 1700s, leading Japanese intellectuals were promoting the independence of worldly secular studies in a fashion paralleling that of the *philosophes* of the European Enlightenment' (Collins 1998: 349). Because similar ingredients – secularisation in the form of freeing intellectual activities from the stronghold of religion, the emergence of educational market place and the rise of popular culture – were found in Tokugawa Japan and contemporary Europe, the ideas and their development which were conditioned by these ingredients had much resemblance to each other, Collins claims. Where Maruyama (1952=1974) sees ideological/intellectual semblance between Tokugawa Japan and contemporary Europe (a manifestation of rationalism in Sorai's work and the urge to recover feelings and emotions in Norinaga's work), Collins sees similarities between Sorai, the advocate of ancient learning, a radical reformer of neo-Confucianism, and the Enlightenment intellectuals because they were responding to similar sets of societal and intellectual conditions (ibid: 361). He further articulates the parallel between Kokugaku and Romanticism in terms of the similarity in attitudes to language:

> Mabuchi promoted national poetry as the linchpin of a new intellectual alliance. Confucian interpretations, he said, must be removed from obscuring the pure development of Japanese literature; scholarship must approach its materials through the Japanese language. It was much the same break as took place in Europe when the Romanticist movement repudiated Latin as the language of scholarship and replaced it with the study of national languages. (*ibid*: 364)

Collins suggests that Kokugaku and Romanticism belong to the same class of phenomena, not primarily because their intellectual content was similar but because intellectual movements that rose in response to these conditions would be similar. In other words, Kokugaku and Romanticism may not share the worldview but they were at least functionally equivalent in the development of intellectual life in a given society[vii].

There is ample support for the claim that Kokugaku has a degree of equivalence with Romanticism. However, Johann Arnason (1997: 344) is sceptical of 'the intuitively plausible but historically imprecise references to Romantic models' from a view point of comparative study of ideas. In his view, the intellectual landscape of Tokugawa Japan was too complex – or too particular – to draw neat parallels with Western experiences; Romanticism presupposes the Enlightenment but if the supposed commonalities between the Enlightenment and neo-Confucianism which underpin the identification of Kokugaku with Romanticism are sound enough, he asks (*ibid*: 345). Arnason's caution points to an inevitable pitfall in theorisation: eagerness to abstract leading to neglect of the particular. Having acknowledged this, the article still contends that the rise of Kokugaku is one of the first instances of Japanese nationalism because it is a collective act of imaging a limited and sovereign polity with individuality which was shared by some members of the polity. The observation is dawn from a sociological analysis of an intellectual movement, not in reference to historical precision.

Eighteenth-century Kokugaku was an intensive, collective self-reflection about who Japanese were, an exercise of human reflexivity which was mobilised to identify and analyse the perceived social ills and it was also an affirmation of human agency to take actions to correct these perceived problems (Burns 2003; Yamashita 1996; McNally 2016; Katsurajima 2008). Tokugawa Japan of the eighteenth century may have been marked with the absence of armed conflict but was experiencing a range of social and political crises. In response to these, *Kokugaku* scholars advocated a return to the pristine, original condition where human beings were at one with the deities and the nature to the degree that the human beings did not have to worry about their free will. The return to the idyllic condition by removing contamination by foreign ways solely depended on human strive. Kokugaku was a cultural programme about what to make sense of themselves and a political programme to put forward a different ideal of leadership. While neo-Confucianists saw unfolding of the universal principles in the form of rule they could see as the solution, Kokugaku scholars proposed a particularistic and naturalistic form of leadership as embodied in the person of the emperor as a direct descendant of the sun goddess (Harootunian 1970). Furthermore, this revivalist movement was an endogenous development. It was not triggered by colonial encounters but emerged in response to the perceived decline within Tokugawa Japan.

Conclusion
The article suggests that, contrary to the dominant modernist interpretation, the rise of nationalism of Japan can be trace back to the rise of Kokugaku in the eighteenth century when Japan was not in close contact with the West. The point here is to challenge the western origin of nationalism thesis by shifting the focus onto the working of human agency. The article has suggested that before the diffusion of nationalism to Japan as predicted by the modernists, Japanese intellectuals were engaged with intensive and collective self-reflection on the question of who the Japanese were and what Japan was. While this exercise of imagination was not accompanied by a similar set of social change in Europe, Kokugaku scholars were engaged with the same endeavour as the Romantic movement: to question one's identity and to assert the importance of emotional authenticity. Kokugaku scholars in eighteenth-century Japan were engaged with imagining the Japanese nation before the form of imagination was transmitted from the West. The article has suggested that when the understanding of nationalism is consciously decoupled from western experiences and focuses

instead on the working of human agency, it gives more scope for making sense of phenomena before nationalism could have diffused with the western expansion to the rest of the world. This may suggest that nationalism as an act of imagining a collectivity as sovereign and self-ruling with individual characters is more universal than the dominant modernist theories would suggest. This indicates that a focus on human agency in its efforts to make sense of their environment is more universal in its approach and therefore leads to a less western-centric understanding of the world.

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[i] As an anonymous reviewer has correctly pointed out, scholars including Grosby (2002), Roshawald (2006) and Gat (2012) have questioned this orthodoxy. However, given the limitation of space, the point will be further pursued elsewhere.

[ii] This relates to an interesting question about how those eighteenth-century Tokugawa intellectuals considered what their enterprise was since there were no equivalent indigenous concepts to 'philosophy', 'religion' or 'thoughts'. For fascinating discussions of the question of translation in nineteenth-century Japan, see Godard (2008) and Howland (2002).

[iii] Muraoka (2006: 10-14) further points out that 'the old way' is not clearly defined by Norinaga and proposes to conceptualise Kokugaku by the time period which it focuses on, as the study of the ancient text regardless of its genre.

[iv] For the investigation of the relationship between the development of various versions of nationalism and the Japan Romantic School, see Doak (1994, 1996 and 2007)

[v] Rangaku of Tokugawa Japan can be seen as a legacy of the sixteenth-century encounter with Europeans, mainly Spanish and Portuguese, in that it continued to convey knowledge from the West.

[vi] Ookubo (1963: 1) however sees an expression of scientific spirit in Kokugaku, a free spirit of inquiry based on evidence.

[vii] Seeing plenty of parallels between intellectual life in Tokugawa Japan and that in contemporary Europe, Collins therefore dismisses the view that Japanese modernisation is westernisation. His view is that Japanese intellectuals were becoming modern in their own way during the Tokugawa period (Collins 1998: 323, 378).