

# Hostile Natives: Violence in the History of American and Japanese Nativism

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Nativism occupies a notorious place in American history. It was a term that originally referred to the hostility of American Protestants to the arrival of Catholic immigrants, mostly ethnic Germans and the Irish. In Japanese history, nativism is commonly used, with some exceptions, as the historiographical classification of the Tokugawa intellectual institution known as Kokugaku, whose followers asserted the need to glorify Japan's noble past as the solution to the social problems of the day, a solution that emerged chiefly through their denigration of foreign influences. The thoroughly scholarly character of Kokugaku contrasts sharply with the main face of antebellum American nativism, the Know-Nothings, whose hostility toward Catholic immigrants reached such legendary proportions so as to be celebrated in popular literature and film, something to which the widespread success and acclaim of *Gangs of New York* attests. Indeed, as the film more than adequately portrays, violence was a hallmark of American nativism, not just by the Know-Nothings and their ilk, but also by their twentieth-century successors, the Ku Klux Klan. With the exception of some

overzealous followers involved in the *shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離 movement of the Meiji period, violence is not something that scholars associate with Kokugaku 国学. This conceptual gap, revolving around the issue of violence, indicates that the association between nativism and Kokugaku in Japanese studies is flawed. At the same time, one of the distinguishing features of Bakumatsu history was the movement known as *sonnō-jōi* 尊王攘夷, in which extreme violence, usually at the hands of the *shishi* 志士, was directed at Western arrivals in Japan, and for which nativism seems a more appropriate classification. By focusing on the issue of physical violence, we can begin the process of diverting the attention of those interested in nativism away from Kokugaku and toward *sonnō-jōi*.

A Philadelphia newspaper editor first used the word nativism in 1844 to signify the phenomenon of American opposition to immigration. Shortly thereafter, opponents of immigration were referred to as nativists, and many of them organized a secret society, which both they and their outside observers called the Know-Nothings. The Know-Nothings were dedicated to the cessation of immigration into the United States and the prevention of immigrants already in the country from becoming American citizens. Since opposition to immigration was clearly at odds with the universalistic and tolerant rhetoric associated with the founding of the United States, it was nearly a century before historians had enough temporal distance to study nativism in any scholarly way, and the result was Ray Billington's *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* of 1938. Billington argued that nativism was not so much anti-immigrant in character as anti-Catholic, since the nativists were

largely unconcerned with immigrants from Great Britain and Anglophone Canada.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for Billington, nativism was synonymous with anti-Catholicism, of which opposition to immigration was but one of its political by-products.

Five years after the appearance of Billington's monograph, Ralph Linton published a seminal article on nativism, "Nativistic Movements," in the journal, *American Anthropologist*. In this article, Linton greatly expanded on the concept of nativism by removing it from American history and applying it to any encounter between European colonizers and indigenous peoples anywhere in the world, including, interestingly enough, sixteenth-century Japan. Linton acknowledged that hostility was one possible outcome of any such intercultural encounter, but it was neither the only one, nor even the most interesting. For Linton, the adoption of European culture, chiefly European technology, by the indigenous peoples, or "natives," was the chief characteristic of a kind of nativism that emerged from situations in which "no factors of actual dominance [were] involved...[so that] the inferior group borrows eagerly from the superior one [.]"<sup>2</sup> Consequently, this interpretation was both more expansive than Billington's and also at odds with it. Linton believed that a good place to begin examining Japanese nativism was the era of the middle and late 1500s, when the Japanese adopted European firearms.

John Higham penned perhaps the most influential monograph on American nativism in 1955, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, a work he revised in 1988. Not surprisingly, Higham synthesized the insights of both

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Rinehart, 1938), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 45, no. 2 (1943), p. 235.

Billington and Linton on the phenomenon of nativism, arguing that it was neither reducible to anti-Catholicism nor strictly the result of a colonial context: Nativism was the extremely hostile reaction of the so-called natives to “an internal minority group on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections.”<sup>3</sup> It is with Higham that we see an emphasis on violence, both symbolic and physical, as a defining trait of nativism: “Does nativism consist only of the particular complex of attitudes dominant in the anti-foreign crusade of the mid-nineteenth century? Or does it extend to every occasion when native inhabitants of a country turn their faces or raise their hands against strangers in their midst?”<sup>4</sup> For Higham, nativism was the domestic counterpart to jingoism, which he saw as the extension of American hostility to nations abroad; in other words, nativism signified a war against foreigners at home while jingoism signified an actual war abroad.<sup>5</sup>

When looking at these three interpretations of nativism, as well as certain variants stemming mostly from Linton’s work, it is clear that Tokugawa-era Kokugaku falls short of expectations as nativism. Although its followers were opposed to all non-Japanese faiths and beliefs, Christianity among them, it was not primarily anti-Christian or anti-Western during its formative period in the eighteenth century. While it would be hard to imagine that adherents of Kokugaku ideas would have embraced the idea of immigrant arrivals in Japan, the fact is that immigration was a non-issue until the conclusion of the Convention of Kanagawa 日米和親条約 with the Americans in 1854. By

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<sup>3</sup> John Higham *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Higham 1988, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Higham 1988, pp. 75-77.

then, the last of the canonical figures of Kokugaku, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843), had been dead for more than a decade. Atsutane, along with the other canonical scholars of Kokugaku, such as Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697-1769) and Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801), spent much of their time voicing their opposition to the dominance of foreign ideas in the Japan of their day, but they were not opposed to the condition of living among foreigners, since there was no such condition in their day, even though Atsutane feared, like many in the early decades of the nineteenth century, that the Russians had designs on a conquest of Japan. Instead, what inspired their scholarly vitriol the most was the fact that their Japanese contemporaries were either unaware of their own ignorance regarding the prevalence of foreign cultural influences in Japan, like Confucianism and Buddhism, or they were unconcerned about it. In any case, the problem from their perspective lay not with foreigners in Japan but with their fellow Japanese.

A comparison between Billington's understanding of nativism and what we know about the history of Kokugaku during the Tokugawa period reveals a rather wide conceptual gap between the two. There were no papal effigies to be burned on Pope Day in Tokugawa Japan, as delighted as the followers of Kokugaku might have been to indulge in this American pastime.<sup>6</sup> By greatly broadening the concept of nativism to make it inclusive of phenomena outside of American history, Linton's work holds more promise for Japanese studies, a fact that some Japanologists have recently recognized. Indeed, the political and even geopolitical contexts of Tokugawa Japan, especially the

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<sup>6</sup> Billington 1938, pp. 18-19.

relationship between Japan and the West, seem to conform more neatly to the colonial encounter envisioned by Linton as the wellspring of nativism, rather than the immigration context examined by both Billington and Higham. However, Linton's focus on cultural adoption, especially with regard to technology, as the defining feature of Japanese nativism, creates conceptual problems for Japanologists, since the followers of Kokugaku railed against cultural adoption, rather than engaging in it themselves. For Linton, a nativist, living within a context of potential but not actual foreign domination, was one who consciously adopted the ideas of foreigner arrivals; among Japanologists, ostensibly following Linton, a nativist was someone who specifically rejected foreign ideas.

Although one of the major theorists of nativism, Higham has received little attention among Japanologists, yet his work holds much analytical promise. Before Higham's concept of nativism can become useful for Japanologists, we must first abandon the context of large-scale immigration that was so critical to the historical character of the American nineteenth century. One could argue that no such condition has ever existed in Japan's recorded history, not even in antiquity, so that the analysis ends before it begins, which might explain why Higham's work is seemingly unknown in Japanese studies. We should, however, preserve the paradigmatic encounter between foreigner arrivals and the natives, the conceptual foundation for Higham's interpretation of nativism, and use it as a point of embarkation for an analysis of Tokugawa nativism. The problem with analyzing Kokugaku as nativism is that it is relevant to neither immigration nor to face-to-face encounters between foreigners and the Tokugawa Japanese. We must therefore abandon, or at least set aside, much of what

we know about the history of Kokugaku, in order to begin applying the concept of nativism to Tokugawa Japan. While Linton's interest in cultural adoption is of little comparative use in the case of both Tokugawa Japan and Kokugaku, his attention to the context of colonialism is still useful, especially for Bakumatsu Japan. The same is true for the historiographical utility of Higham's emphasis on the extreme hostility engendered by actual interactions between immigrants and natives, as it is much more focused and specific than Linton's overly inclusive view of nativism. It is not possible to substitute one theorist for another, Linton for Higham or vice versa, since both have their useful ideas. What we need to do, therefore, is to blend the useful aspects of their interpretations together into a hybrid concept, one that would be useful not only for Japanese studies, but also for other fields having nothing to do with either the United States or Japan.

When Higham noted the emergence of hostility among Americans to the arrival of immigrants, he argued that the extremes to which this hostility reached could only be the result of a condition in which the members of both groups lived within close proximity of one another. While the Know-Nothings vociferously denounced Catholic immigrants within the public sphere as a collective threat to Americans both culturally and politically, they were not averse to the use of physical intimidation as a means to achieve their goals. In the decades before the Civil War, the Know-Nothings and their allies forged ties with gangs of street thugs in nearly every major urban area of the North, where there were high concentrations of immigrants, and encouraged them to deal with the immigration issue in more direct and brutal ways. These gangs readily professed their American authenticity and purity and were more than happy to defend

the United States and their fellow Americans against the immigrant horde; not surprisingly, the immigrants formed their own gangs to face off against their nativist foes. The clashes between these gangs turned parts of major American cities, like New York City, into virtual war zones, as the book, *Gangs of New York*, portrays in vivid detail:

During the summer of 1834 the opportunities for the gangs to engage in their natural employment were greatly increased by the appearance of two new political groups, the Native Americans [a forerunner of both the Native American Party and the American Party, a.k.a., the Know-Nothings] and the Equal Rights Party...The Native Americans deplored the election of foreigners to office, and vigorously demanded the repeal of the naturalization laws by which Tammany Hall had gained such an enormous following of Irish voters. The Native Americans took the place of the Whigs in some of the municipal elections...and hired gangsters to blackjack their opponents...The Bowery gang known as the American Guards, the membership of which prided themselves on their native ancestry, was soon devotedly attached to the Native Americans party...During the summer of 1835, about a year after the election riots, bitter enmity developed between this gang and the O'Connell Guards...the particular champion of the Irish element of Tammany Hall. The gangs came to blows on June 21, 1835 at Grand and Crosby streets on the lower East Side. The fighting spread as far as the Five Points...Dr. W.M. Caffrey, a noted surgeon, was killed by a brickbat while trying to make his way through the mob to attend a patient [.]<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld* (New York: Vintage, 2008 [1928]), pp. 34-35.



While a similarly colorful event from the era of Kokugaku's intellectual development, roughly 1690 to 1840, is non-existent, analogous encounters between the Japanese and foreigner arrivals took place roughly two decades after the gang fight described above. As the Europeans and the Americans began to establish treaty ports and take up residence in Japan beginning in 1856, rogue samurai as well as *rōnin* 浪人 took up arms against these Westerners in an attempt to effect *jō'i*, namely, “the expulsion of the barbarian,” becoming *shishi* in the process.

While *jō'i* seems to suggest hostility and even violence, and the actions of the *shishi* and others would certainly bolster this perception, this was not always the case. As Bob Wakabayashi has observed, *jō'i* was a term from Chinese antiquity that referred to the Sinicization of the non-Han groups both inside and outside of the imperial Chinese state.<sup>8</sup> Members of these non-Han ethnic groups intent on adopting Chinese cultural institutions successfully had to purge themselves of their “barbarian” ways first; *jō'i*, therefore, meant to “expel the barbarian within oneself,” filling the resultant cultural void with Chinese civilization. The original concept of *jō'i* was a kind of barbarian self-cultivation, having nothing to do with any forced imposition of Chinese culture, let alone physical violence. Once the concept of *jō'i* reached Japan, any trappings of contemplative acculturation were lost over time, and its target, the culture of the barbarian, was replaced with the barbarians themselves, people who had to be driven out of Japan. Tokugawa intellectuals, along with the political leaders they served,

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<sup>8</sup> Bob Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825* (Cambridge: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986), p. 21.

such as Tokugawa Nariaki 徳川齊昭 (1800-1860), argued that the imperative to bring about *jō'i* in the 1850s was actually the latest such instance in a long history of successful expulsions of Westerners from Japan's shores dating back to the sixteenth century. For Nariaki, *jō'i* was a political necessity not only as a means of preserving Japan's territorial integrity, it was also intimately connected to the Bakufu's policies of geopolitical isolation, what was known as *sakoku* 鎖国 in Nariaki's time. In 1825, under the influence of Nariaki's scholarly advisor, Aizawa Seishisai 会沢正志齋 (1781-1863), the Bakufu ordered domains with coastal frontiers to shoot at foreign ships attempting to enter Japanese waters, and to kill any foreigner who managed to land on Japan's shores; this was known as the Expulsion Edict (Munen Uchiharai no Rei 無念打払令). By the time of Commodore Matthew Perry's (1794-1858) arrival in 1853, the association of *jō'i* with the violent expulsion of Westerners from Japan was something with which members of the warrior class were already familiar.

Although the Convention of Kanagawa of 1854, and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce 日米修好通商条約 of 1858, were concluded between the Americans and the Tokugawa Bakufu, they initially lacked any support from the imperial court; in fact, Emperor Kōmei 孝明天皇 (1831-1867), under the influence of Mito 水戸藩 scholars like Aizawa Seishisai, was expressly and openly opposed to any such treaty. The absence of imperial approval for these treaties, as well as those concluded with the other Western powers, was critical, since it gave warriors the justification they needed for carrying out *jō'i* in the emperor's name. The warriors who dedicated themselves to carrying out the wishes of the emperor at this time were known as the *shishi*, and they relished the

personal, face-to-face kind of confrontation with Westerners envisioned in the Expulsion Edict, which called on warriors to dispatch any foreigners who had actually landed in Japan. Unfortunately for the *shishi*, the killing of Westerners in Japan after 1856 represented a conflation of Bakufu-approved *jō'i* with court-approved *jō'i*. This fact made life for the *shishi* quite dangerous, and once imperial approval for the treaties was finally secured, they became targets themselves.

The assassination of Henry Heusken (1832-1861) is a good example of how brutal and deadly a *shishi* encounter could be for a Westerner during the Bakumatsu era. Heusken was a Dutch interpreter who worked for Townsend Harris (1804-1878), the first American consul to the Tokugawa Bakufu. Attacks on Westerners by the *shishi* began soon after Westerners began landing on Japanese soil. The celebrated patriot, Sakamoto Ryōma 坂本龍馬 (1836-1867), vowed to behead any Westerner in Japan shortly after hearing about the arrival of Perry in 1853,<sup>9</sup> and Ryōma was certainly not the only warrior who harbored such feelings, so it likely came as no surprise to anyone that such attacks actually occurred during the latter half of the 1850s. Harris warned his staff not to return to Zenpukuji 善福寺, where the American legation was housed, at night, for fear of falling victim to the sword of some *shishi* bent on carrying out *jō'i*. Undaunted, Heusken accepted a dinner invitation on January 15, 1861, returning, against Harris's admonitions, to Zenpukuji with only his two Bakufu escorts. A group of black-clad warriors descended on Heusken and his guards and the ensuing encounter went very badly for Heusken:

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<sup>9</sup> Sakamoto Ryōma, *Sakamoto Ryōma kankei monjo*, vol. 1, edited by Iwasaki Hideshige (Tokyo: Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1926), p. 36.

Two of the masked swordsmen almost simultaneously attacked Heusken from both sides. The first to reach him thrust his sword upward from the left. To parry the attack, Heusken jerked his body to the right, thus exposing himself to the attacker on the other side. The man on his right swept his sword upward, slashing Heusken deeply as the Dutchman spurred his horse to escape. The attack happened so fast and his horse obeyed so well that Heusken's first reaction was one of relief to have escaped the thrust from the side. Only when the horse galloped a few paces did he begin to feel pain...[After dismounting,] Heusken lay mortally wounded in the street[.]<sup>10</sup>

Heusken lingered for several hours before finally bleeding to death.

The victims of attacks by the *shishi* were not limited to Westerners. Katsu Kaishū 勝海舟 (1823-1899), the founder of the Bakufu's first navy, came close to falling victim to Sakamoto Ryōma's blade; after some quick thinking and fast talking, he managed to win over Ryōma to his point of view, and Ryōma later pledged himself to Kaishū's teaching. Ryōma himself was not quite so lucky as his teacher, Kaishū, famously falling to the sword of an assassin in a Kyoto inn in December of 1867. Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山 (1811-1864), whose teachings inspired Kaishū's pro-*kaikoku* 開国 views, was cut down by a renowned swordsmen three years after Heusken's assassination, while another famous Japanese victim of the *shishi*, Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼 (1815-1860), the *tairō* 大老 and de facto leader of the Bakufu, was killed by warriors from Mito and

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<sup>10</sup> Reinier Hesselink, "The Assassination of Harry Heusken," *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 49, no. 3, (Autumn 1994), p. 333.

Satsuma less than a year before Heusken's death. At the same time, the activities of pro-*jō'i* supporters were not confined to such personal, face-to-face attacks as those carried out by the *shishi*. In 1863 and 1864, the daimyo of Chōshū 長州藩, Mōri Takachika 毛利敬親 (1819-1871), operating under the direction of the imperial court, ordered his units manning the domain's coastal batteries to attack Western ships attempting to pass through the Straits of Shimonoseki 下関海峡. These attacks prompted the launching of two Western military campaigns against Chōshū, which led to the destruction of these coastal batteries and the temporary occupation of its territory. Ironically, Chōshū's initial attacks, in the cause of *jō'i*, against Western shipping seeking passage through the Inland Sea, not only were militarily unsuccessful, but they also led to the actual landing of Western military forces in Japan. Rather than prevent or preempt an invasion, these attacks precipitated one.

### Conclusion

The connection between *jō'i* and violence, whether of the up-close-and-personal kind or of the at-a-distance variety, is undeniable, and it is something which makes the Bakumatsu era such a colorful and interesting time in Japan's history. American cities of the antebellum North were also turned into battlegrounds from time to time between immigrant gangs and their nativist enemies. Thus, violence and the arrival of foreigners were experiences shared by both the Americans and the Japanese of the 1850s and the 1860s, indicating a potential connection between violence and intercultural/

intersocietal encounters. Ray Billington mentioned the hostile and even violent, if only in a symbolic way, aspects of the activities of Americans opposed to the Pope and the Catholic Church. He was, however, less interested in cataloging the depth or breadth of this hostility as he was focused on demonstrating how widespread anti-Catholicism was in the United States before the Civil War. The anthropologist, Ralph Linton, found the phenomenon of nativism so compelling that he revised Billington's conception to be inclusive of case studies other than American history, thereby isolating nativism's paradigmatic structure to the encounter between members of different societies. In his close analysis of the nature of these encounters, Linton, like Billington, mentions the role of hostility and violence without any special emphasis; if anything, Linton emphasized the non-violent adoption of technology as the most interesting outcome of any intercultural encounter in which actual domination had yet to develop. It was John Higham, whose monograph on American nativism earned for him the reputation as its leading authority, who foregrounded violence as a hallmark of nativism, not only of American nativism but also for nativism in general.

Despite Higham's contributions to the study of nativism, the field of Japanese studies has focused its attention almost exclusively on Edo-era Kokugaku as Japanese nativism. For Higham, Kokugaku would no doubt not qualify as nativism at all, since its followers had virtually no significant connection to foreigner arrivals in Japan, and it was the face-to-face encounters engendered by interactions between the two groups, for Higham, that fueled nativism with the negative emotions needed to culminate in violence. As John Breen and others have argued, the field of Japanese studies has relied

on Linton for its conceptual guidance on the phenomenon of nativism,<sup>11</sup> yet Kokugaku bears no striking family resemblance to Linton's emphasis on technological adoption; not surprisingly, Linton observed how the adoption of European technology by the Japanese in the sixteenth century was the paradigmatic example of premodern Japanese nativism, not Kokugaku.

Kokugaku was not an example of Tokugawa nativism, let alone THE example of Tokugawa nativism. By using the colonial context from Linton's concept of nativism and combining it with Higham's emphasis on extreme hostility as the chief characteristic of nativism, we have developed a hybrid category of nativism applicable to Tokugawa Japan. Wielding such a concept effectively pulls the attention of Japanologists away from Kokugaku and pushes it toward the events and personalities associated with *jō'i* during the Bakumatsu era.

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<sup>11</sup> John Breen, "Nativism Restored," *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), p. 430.