Common Narratives in Discourses on National Identity in Russia and Japan

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses some common narratives found in discourses on national identity in Russia and Japan, and their temporal transformations reflecting the needs of a nation as it becomes a colonial empire. National identity discourse is examined from the viewpoint of national antagonism arising from an external threat. Russian and Japanese intellectuals, with their vastly different historical and cultural heritage, have dwelled upon similar issues pertaining to modernization of the state and adoption or rejection of foreign ideas and ways of life. There are several themes in Russian and Japanese discourses on national identity that share a significant overlap, particularly themes of national uniqueness and a ‘special path’, deterministic worldviews, imperial cosmopolitanism/messianism and criticism of ‘Western’ philosophical systems and concepts. This article elucidates the shared aspects of these narratives and philosophical inquiries in Russia and Japan and puts them into a historical context.

National identity, a collective sense of belonging to a particular nation, has long operated within a discourse of its own in Russia and Japan. As Smith (1991) points out, ‘national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture’ (p. 17). It is possible to encounter numerous accounts of what constitutes a representative member of the Russian and Japanese nations. For Japan, perhaps the most well-known example of national identity discourse is nihonjinron, a genre of publications that appeared in the post-war period onward, which includes such authors as Watsuji Tetsurō, Ruth Benedict, Nakane Chie, Doi Takeo and Takie Sugiyama Lebra, and their critics Befu Harumi, Sugimoto Yoshio, Peter Dale and others. For Russia, one of the most notable examples of national identity discourse is the debate between the intellectual groups known as Slavophiles (Aleksey Khomyakov, Ivan Kireyevsky and others) and Westernizers (Pyotr Chaadaev, Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Ogarev and others). Although discussions on ‘Russianness’ and ‘Japaneseness’ can be traced back much earlier, Russian and Japanese discourses on national identity generally coincide with the countries’ development as nation states.

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The post-war period has seen an increasing popularity in case studies in academic and popular literature comparing Japan with other countries in various aspects, including specialized fields such as management (John & Soni, 2014), reforms (Hua, 2009), marketing and investment strategies (Khan, 1988) and philosophy (Jones, 2002). Most of the nihonjinron works discussed in this article also contain a comparative element. Some of these comparisons were made by travellers not native to either culture (Ovchinnikov, 1983). There have also been publications in popular literature with comparative aspects, such as comparisons of ‘Western’ and ‘Japanese’ business logic (March, 1988), or right-wing writings discussing Japan’s colonial legacy in Korea (O & Otani, 2015) and cultural comparisons with neighbouring countries (O, 2000). This article’s focus, however, is situated primarily within the intellectual and academic context.

There is particular value in a comparative study of Russia and Japan, as both nations, despite being seemingly remote in historical, cultural and political aspects, have developed remarkably similar philosophical systems and national discourses in the context of facing an external threat. Oguma (2002), for instance, finds value in comparing Pan-Asianism and Pan-Slavism, and notes the similarity in national identity discourse in Japan and Imperial Russia as opposed to Great Britain and France (pp. 330–331). There are also studies of national identity discourses directly related to Japan and Russia. Bukh (2010), for instance, examines Japan’s foreign policy and relationship with Russia from the identity perspective. There have also been comparisons of the concepts of community and space in Russian and Japanese philosophies (Botz-Bornstein, 2007). This article builds and expands upon these discussions by putting the discourse on national identity into the context of national antagonism and identifying several common narratives encountered in the works of Russian and Japanese thinkers.

There are several common themes in Russian and Japanese discourses on national identity. Intellectuals of both Russia and Japan have used the notion of ‘the West’ to define their nation’s cultural uniqueness; there are several deterministic arguments—geographical and, in case of Japan, biological factors—that supposedly define the ‘natural’ uniqueness of the nation; examples of social structures (particularly in references to collectivism) are given to illustrate perceived national uniqueness; finally, the idea of a messianic mission allegedly undertaken by the nation is encountered in Russian and Japanese texts of mid- to late nineteenth century, when both states were imperial powers interested in acquiring new territories. A reverse trend to ‘homogenize’ the national image emerges as the states face an identity vacuum following a colonial crisis. Isolating key themes in national identity discourses helps elucidate the common rhetorics of nationalist writing that are not necessarily peculiar to Russia or Japan.

Discourses on national identity emerge as a result of an inevitable confrontation between Self and Other. There needs to be an image of Other to invoke reflections on Self, and discourses on national identity are discourses on national difference. This difference does not need to be substantial; however, the awareness of difference is strengthened by the antagonism between Self and Other. A discourse on national identity may also be influenced by economic, political or social needs of the nation—for example, it can include the inhabitants of newly colonized lands (in the case of Japan, as argued by Walker (2001), Oguma (2002) and Mason (2012), during Japanese colonization of Hokkaido and Okinawa), or it can be altered as an imperial power loses dominance over its former colonies and separate identities become more prominent,
such as during the collapse of the USSR, or with the loss of Japanese control over Korea and Taiwan.

When Self comes in contact with Other (or is merely aware of Other’s presence), a two-way stereotyping process takes place. The need to draw a border encourages propagation of simplified, exaggerated ideas of what ‘we’ and ‘they’ are. The myth is perpetuated in a descriptive form to promote a somewhat solidified image of ‘us’ as a model to follow. These stereotypical images of Self can be accompanied by narratives that attempt to explain the origins of national traits and define the nation’s position in relation to other nations, or in the world as a whole. These narratives are often embraced or manipulated by the nation state to influence external and internal policy, as well as public opinion on matters important to the state.

The last section of the article discusses such narratives from a comparative perspective of imperial cosmopolitanism that played an important role in Pan-Slavic movement in Russia and Pan-Asian movement in Japan. Some pan-nationalisms developed in response to Western colonialism, such as Pan-African and Pan-American movements. A characteristic trait of pan-nationalism in Russia and Japan has been its objective to unify a group of different ethnicities, as opposed to Pan-Germanism, for example, which sought to unify ethnic Germans in Europe. There have been other comparative studies of pan-nationalisms in the context of anti-Westernization, such as the Pan-Muslim and Pan-Asian movements (Aydin, 2007). It is important to note nevertheless that the Pan-Slavic aspirations were not unanimously shared among the Slavic nations, and intellectuals of the time noted other pan-nationalist movements among the Slavs, such as ‘the great Bulgarian’ and ‘the great Serbian’ ideas (Solovyov, 1999, p. 629). In this regard, the Pan-Slavism discussed in this article is limited to Russian Pan-Slavism.

**Historical Antecedents: Nativist Schools of Kokugaku and Slavophilia**

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russia and Japan had considerably different histories of interaction with ‘the West’: Japan had largely limited Western contact until the Meiji period, while Russia was not removed from Western politics; and by the time Japan was ‘reopened’ precipitating more involved American and European contact, Russia had already taken part in the Napoleonic Wars, as well as lost the Crimean War. Moreover, Russia had already undertaken westernization to some degree with the efforts of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century, and by the mid-nineteenth century had already received extensive Western influence.

Nevertheless, both nations have had nativist schools that shared similar arguments and rhetorics. Some earlier discussions on ‘Japaneseness’ can be traced back to the Edo period, particularly by such figures as Kada no Azumamaro, Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga. Japanese nativist thought was represented by the school of National Learning (kokugaku), which started as a scholarly investigation into the philology of Japanese classical literature and extended through a range of topics associated with pre-Confucian Japan. The primary subjects of kokugaku study, namely the classical literary works Kojiki and Nihonshoki, can be seen as the roots of the Japanese quest for national identity. Much like Russian philosophers of the nineteenth century, Japanese thinkers were pre-occupied with such themes as westernization, forgotten wisdom of the past (in
case of Japan, pre-Buddhist and pre-Confucian past) and religion. Nosco (1990) has conducted an extensive analysis of Japanese eighteenth century nativism, isolating its seventeenth century antecedents and connecting its themes to resurging nostalgic interest in Japanese history in the 1980s. Norinaga and others were pre-occupied with the ‘ancient Way’ (kodô) of the past, which they attempted to reconstruct via re-entering the past through their investigations and re-animating the dormant ‘true heart’ (mago-koro), which would lead them to the understanding of what was ‘purely’ Japanese about Japan through its primordially distant past (Nosco, 1990, p. xii).

Kokugaku investigations attempted to shift the focus of Japanese scholarship of the time from then—dominant studies of Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism and classical Chinese texts to studies of Shinto and classical Japanese poetry, which were seen by these scholars as ‘real’ Japanese. Norinaga’s works, for instance, employ the term karagokoro (‘Chinese heart’) to contrast with the ‘true heart’ Japanese way of thinking, which needed to be ‘purified’ of foreign ways (Nosco, 1990, pp. 175–177). It could also be said that kokugaku arose out a perceived need to recuperate and defend the Japanese canon against Neo-Confucian criticisms.

It is important to point out the role of kokugaku inquiries in the historical context of late Tokugawa Japan. The arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry’s ‘black ships’ in Japanese harbours and the signing of Kanagawa treaty that opened the ports of Hakodate and Shimoda to the United States trade led to increased concern about Japanese sovereignty. A large proportion of the populace was disconcerted with the Tokugawa bakufu’s inability to resist foreign invasion. It was debated whether Japan should return to the traditional ways of life (fukko) or appeal to the Emperor’s supreme authority (osei). The discussions led to adoption of a policy that was summarised in the expression: ‘Revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians’ (sonnô jôi), which developed into a widespread anti-foreign and legitimist sentiment inspired by writings of kokugaku investigators and samurai scholars of Mito. The aim of the political philosophy of sonnô jôi was to stress the importance of preserving the legitimacy of a sovereign ruler against a foreign threat, which served as an ideological base for the protest movement against the Tokugawa bakufu. The phrase itself became a political slogan in the movement to overthrow the shogunate and restore the power of the Japanese Emperor. ‘Expel the barbarians’ was the starting point of Japanese nationalism in the late Tokugawa period. It also merged with aspirations of the ruling class to maintain their social privileges, which caused the common people to become estranged, and triggered a break within Japanese society that later led to social unrest. It is argued that for the Japanese ruling class, the term ‘national consciousness’ meant above all defending the traditional socio-political order from Christianity and industrialism (Maruyama, 1969, p. 139). In the political sense, the ‘expel the barbarians’ component sheds some light on Japanese external policy. After the lifting of the sakoku (closed nation) policy, which lasted for more than 200 years, Japan was not ready to maintain dialogue with other nations on a horizontal axis. The hierarchical structure of Japanese society projected onto its politics, and relations with external powers were seen in the superior–inferior paradigm: either conquer, or be conquered. In other words, there was no awareness of equality in international affairs. This political transition represents a shift in the paradigm of Japanese national antagonism, where ‘Chinese heart’ was substituted with (Western) ‘barbarians’,
although the core of the antagonism—political tension and cultural investigations into Self in response to an external threat from Other—remained the same.

A somewhat similar discourse emerged in nineteenth century Russia. Discussions on ‘Russianness’ were inspired by the spirit of the time: formation of nation-states, colonialism and romantic nationalism. Russia was by no means removed from European politics, and the Russian Empire continued expanding. By the year 1800, Russia had acquired territories of present-day Belarus, Ukraine and parts of modern Latvia during the partitioning of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, 1793 and 1795. In 1783, Eastern Georgia became a part of Russia by the Treaty of Georgievsk, and in the same year Russia expanded in the Black Sea region by acquiring Crimea. The Napoleonic wars ended with a failed French invasion of Russia in 1812, and by that time the question of self-identification had become an important issue for young Russian intelligentsia. This longing for national identity can even be found in linguistic cues: the French invasion was and still is referred to in Russian as Otechestvennaya voyna, which is usually translated as the Patriotic War. The adjective otechestvennaya comes from the noun otechestvo (Fatherland) and signifies this war’s importance to Russian history and patriotism. Apart from external tension, political turmoil within the state also intensified, with the strengthening appeals to abolish serfdom and the rapid rise and decline of the anti-monarchist Decembist uprising.

The intense debate on Russian national uniqueness was started with a provocative discussion of Russia’s perceived civilizational backwardness, which still emphasized Russia’s peculiarity in contrast to Europe. In the first of his Philosophical Letters (written in 1829, published in 1834 in the Telescope periodical), Pyotr Chaadaev sets up the question of Russian identity: ‘We may be said to be an exception among peoples’ (Chaadaev, 1966, p. 164); ‘…we have never moved in concert with the other peoples. We do not belong to any of the great families of the human race; we are neither of the West nor of the East, and we have not the traditions of either’ (1966, p. 162). In his letter, Chaadaev juxtaposes Russia and the Western civilization (the term used interchangeably with ‘Europe’) and argues that all countries in Western Europe, despite their divergent traditions and histories, share a common legacy (‘a common physiognomy, a family look’), an atmosphere of duty, justice, right and order, while Russia lacks ‘a certain assurance, a certain method in our thinking, a certain logic’ (1966, pp. 164–165). He also stresses that, while Russians are praised by foreigners for some qualities, such as ‘careless temerity’ (1966, p. 166) and other features Chaadaev deems characteristic of ‘backward’ peoples, Russia does not display traits of a highly developed nation. He believes, however, that Russia, as a special civilization situated neither in the East nor in the West, ‘resting one elbow against China and the other on Germany’ (1966, p. 166), encompasses two fundamental principles—reason and imagination—and has a mission to reunite the history of the entire globe in its civilization. ‘We are one of those nations which do not appear to be an integral part of the human race, but exist only in order to teach some great lesson to the world’ (1966, p. 164). On the other hand, Chaadaev bitterly acknowledges that the Russians ‘have not taken the trouble to invent anything’, and have not learned anything from the inventions of others, except borrowing ‘empty conceits’ and ‘useless luxuries’ (1966, p. 167).

Chaadaev’s publication caused a strong reaction from both the imperial government and other intellectuals of the time. The Telescope was shut down and Chaadaev was
declared a madman. At the same time, Chaadaev’s letter sparked the discussion known as the philosophical debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers over the necessity, the areas and the extent of Western European influence on Russian culture. Chaadaev’s publication is considered the starting point in the separation of Slavophiles and Westernizers (Walicki, 1979, p. 91). With his vision of Russia as an immature, backward nation in a desperate need to follow the European example, Chaadaev can be regarded a Westernizer. Slavophiles, on the contrary, argued for a different path that was unique to Russia. While these two standpoints seem incompatible in their approach to modernization, the vision of Russia in the Self–Other paradigm did not differ substantially between Slavophiles and Westernizers, as neither questioned Russia’s extraneousness to Western Europe. McDaniel argues that both camps ‘rest their case on the uniqueness of Russia’ (McDaniel, 1996, p. 13). There is also a view that the idea of the Russian nation discussed by Slavophiles was not shaped in opposition to Europe, but instead was a reaction to the feeling of cultural backwardness experienced by the Russian intelligentsia, who intended to overcome it by assuming Russia’s messianic role in the world civilization (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 16–19). This is a valid criticism of the common standpoint that the Slavophile movement was a product of Russia–Europe opposition. This article’s view, however, is that there is certain contingency to an identity struggle. The term ‘antagonism’ would be more suitable than ‘opposition’ to describe a process taking place in national identity discourse. The idea of an antagonistic relationship addresses the problem of seemingly contradictory viewpoints as it includes the element of contingency. Hence, both viewpoints are correct: Europe was indeed ‘Othered’ by Slavophiles, but the nature of their relationship was more complex than direct opposition as it includes an element of borrowing and adaptation.

‘Otherness’ of Europe was a common idea among Slavophiles. Aleksey Khomyakov, who is considered one of the founders of the Slavophile school of thought, claims that Russia was completely alien to the Western world until Peter the Great’s reforms, during which Russia concentrated the ‘thought of the state’ in the emperor’s personality, embraced Western traditions and industries while losing many of its autochthonous traditions and cultural practices (Khomyakov, 1988, p. 54). Khomyakov does not regard that as a necessarily negative development, but he also puts emphasis on the advantage that Russia supposedly had over the West in spiritual life, being untainted by individualism, having strong family ties and being able to uncover the mystical ‘truths’ inaccessible to the Western civilization (1988, p. 55). Khomyakov concludes his article with a suggestion that Russia should continue borrowing Western inventions and practices, but it should also look into them to give them a deeper meaning and discover ‘human principles’ that remain a mystery to the West (1988, pp. 55–56). It would be shameful of Russia not to leave the West behind, he points out. Khomyakov’s article represents a different approach to Russian national uniqueness and argues for national self-reflection by turning to Russia’s earlier, pre-Petrine history. The spirit of Ancient Rus, with all its social and political problems, bore the mystical ‘truth’ that was lost due to the weakness of the state, the unstable social institutions and the struggle against Russia’s enemies, and forgotten with Peter’s endeavours to consolidate the state’s power (1988, p. 56).

It could be argued that Russian nineteenth century thinkers hardly disputed Russia’s national uniqueness, and they did not consider Russia a part of the Western civilization.
Antagonization of the West was an integral part of Russian national discourse. In an antagonistic relationship, Other’s presence is a crucial aspect to Self’s identity as a point of reference. Therefore, the term ‘West’ is not merely a synonym for Western Europe in the Russian context, but is also an embodiment of the antagonized Other that affects and challenges Self’s identity formation. Slavophiles were pre-occupied with preserving and reconstructing the ‘real’ (as opposed to ‘Europeanized’) Russia, in a similar way kokugaku scholars were rediscovering ‘true’ Japan by attempting to free themselves from Chinese influence. China and Chinese studies, or kangaku (Nosco, 1990, p. 9) were a similar target for Japanese nativist scholarship as Western Europe and Westernizers were for Slavophiles. It is possible to argue that both kokugaku and Slavophilia surged as an expression of the political and cultural antagonism directed against their neighbours (China, Western Europe) as a form of resistance to perceived attempts by domestic forces to impose ‘foreign’ standards on its people.

As can be seen from the arguments above, Japanese nativist scholarship in the eighteenth century and early discourses on ‘Russianness’ in the nineteenth century share a number of similar narratives: national uniqueness, resistance to perceived ‘contamination’ with foreign ideas and ways of thinking, and attempts to reconstruct the ‘pure’ and ‘real’ native culture by turning to values and institutions derived from classical literature and earlier history. The idea of Japanese superiority was derived from the assumption that Japanese people were the bearers of the ‘true heart’ and the ‘ancient Way’, or ‘natural Way’ reflecting the will of the gods. Norinaga in particular claimed that, as Nosco puts it, ‘Japan’s priority was rested in the fact that it was created first among all countries by the native Japanese deities, and that all the world owed gratitude to the Japanese sun/sun goddess for her radiating warmth and sunshine’ (Nosco, 1990, p. 13). Pre-Confucian and pre-Buddhist times to the Japanese scholars represented a historical point of reference similar (albeit more glorified) to what pre-Petrine Russia meant to Slavophiles. The narrative of the ‘loss of ancient wisdom’ to foreign ways of thinking is prominent in both discourses: Khomyakov’s ‘rebirth of the ancient Rus’ can be compared to Norinaga’s appeals to revive the ‘ancient Way’ and cleanse the Japanese ‘true heart’ from Chinese spirit (karagokoro). Much like kokugaku scholars, Slavophiles were pre-occupied with ‘contamination’ of Russian life with foreign (in this case, Western European) practices and criticized their ‘declining’ neighbours for excessive emphasis on rationality, while praising Russian spirituality.

**National Uniqueness and Determinism in Slavophilia and Nihonjinron**

The cornerstone of a national identity discourse is delineating who ‘we’ are, and how ‘we’ are different from ‘them’. However, there is also an impulse to explain this difference, which is often achieved by a deterministic argument. The assumption of causality between culture and some external factor—such as geographical location, landscape and climate, race, political circumstances or certain events in national history—has played a major role in both Russian and Japanese discourses on national uniqueness. Determinism is an integral part of Self–Other antagonism, which was the core of national identity discourse in Japan and Russia. Botz-Bornstein (2007) discusses climatic determinism in Japanese (Watsuji) and Russian (Danilevsky, Trubetskoy, Savitsky) discourses (p. 271). Grier makes note of Russian particularism or exceptionalism as a central
idea in the debates over the meaning of Russian history (Grier, 2003, p. 29). He also compares the idea of Russian national uniqueness to those of Germany and Japan, and points out that such doctrines of a nation’s special significance are common among most nations in the world. Cherepanova (2010) examines the Russian narrative of national uniqueness and ‘special path’ and its connection with Western intellectualism. The sentiment of Russians being fundamentally different from Western Europeans due to their lesser emphasis on logic and order dominated Russian nineteenth century thought, and it seems a unanimous agreement among Russian philosophers of the nineteenth century that Russia is, in a deep spiritual way, distinct from other European nations. Similar observations were made by Japanese authors on the unique Japanese way of thinking, or Japanese cultural logic.

The twentieth century in Japan saw another wave of discussions on Japanese identity. A substantial body of these discussions is represented in the genre of texts generally referred to as *nihonjinron*, or ‘theories on Japanese people’. This genre encompasses works in various fields, ranging from philosophy and anthropology to economics and language teaching. While most *nihonjinron* works are written by Japanese, there are notable exceptions, such as the classic 1946 work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict or Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1948, trans. 1953). Among the well-known *nihonjinron* authors are Watsuji Tetsurô, Nishida Kitarô, Nakane Chie, Mishima Yukio, Doi Takeo and Takie Sugiyama Lebra. Thorough critiques of *nihonjinron* writings were conducted in English by Peter Dale (1986), Befu Harumi and Sugimoto Yoshio. Dale’s critique includes a series of tables listing the bases for deterministic arguments expressed in *nihonjinron*, among which are climate, race, mode of production, society, intellectual style and others (1986, pp. 42, 44–46, 51). Some of these themes, particularly geoclimatic and social factors, can be encountered in the works of Russian intellectuals as well. *Nihonjinron* presented another wave of essentialist thinking that operated within a network of assumptions to perpetuate the idea of Japanese national uniqueness and explain it from deterministic positions. Similar to Slavophiles in Russia, *nihonjinron* thinkers used an image of ‘the West’ to discuss the perceived unique traits of their society.

Some of these identity investigations, much like their Russian counterparts, began as all-encompassing studies attempting to define the nature of human beings and the origins of culture. Watsuji Tetsurô, a renowned twentieth century Japanese moral philosopher and scholar of cultural and intellectual history, has produced such works as *Climate* (1935, trans. *A Climate: a Philosophical Study*, 1961) and *Rinrigaku*, or *Ethics* (1937, 1942, 1949, trans. *Watsuji Tetsurô’s Rinrigaku*, 1996). Both *Climate* and *Ethics* contain analysis and critiques of European philosophical concepts, and revolve around themes and ideas that have parallels in Russian philosophical inquiries into national identity. In *Climate*, Watsuji attempts to clarify ‘the function of climate as a factor within the structure of human existence’, which he juxtaposes to Heidegger’s *Zeit und Sein* that treats ‘the structure of a man’s existence in terms of time’ (Watsuji, 1961, p. v). *Ethics* also contains a critique of Heidegger’s idea of authentic self as Watsuji argues against the existence of a private self (Sevilla, 2014, p. 84). Based on his rich travel experience, Watsuji attempted to create a highly structured system of thinking that explained culture through geographical and climatic factors. For Watsuji, only Japan has the peculiar combination of ‘tropical’ and ‘frigid’ traits that makes the Japanese ‘full of
emotional vitality and sensitivity, lacking all continental phlegm’ (Watsuji, 1961, p. 135). The term ‘West’ is frequently encountered in the same subchapter. Japan, in Watsuji’s mind, has a barely identifiable, yet important fundamental trait that comprises its peculiarity: ‘...I was made suddenly and keenly aware of the strange character of Japan, a strangeness in no way inferior to that of the Arabian desert, a strangeness which makes Japan unique in the world’ (1961, p. 156). Japan is given special treatment in this framework of essentialist thinking. It is peculiar how Watsuji describes the affinity between Russian and Japanese indifference to public affairs to underline Japan’s rarity: ‘Russia is autocratic and its people in general have never participated in government; this is closely paralleled by the indifference of the Japanese to matters of public concern and their lack of a cooperative attitude to life. So this further instance of Japan’s rarity or strangeness—the fact that there are movements with leaders only can be said to be based on the distinction between “house” and “outside’’ (1961, p. 170). Watsuji concludes that there may be even more unique Japanese traits that he ascribes to the nature of the Japanese home.

Similar aspirations to create an all-encompassing system to explain differences between cultures existed in Russian philosophy, with Khomyakov’s Semiramis (also known as Notes on World History) and Danilevsky’s theory of cultural-historical types being the most prominent examples. Khomyakov’s Semiramis portrays world history as an arena where two historical-religious ‘principles’ are pitted against each other—Iranism (principle of freedom) and Cushism (principle of necessity). The principles are tied to the struggle between different races. Iranism is a principle that encourages freedom and self-reflection, while Cushism regards morality as secondary to the needs of the material world. This dichotomy bears similarity to Nietzsche’s distinction of Apollonian and Dionysian, Schlegel’s Cainites and Sephites, as well as other polarizing distinctions proposed by various intellectuals (Granin, 2013). Kush-dominated civilizations are practical and ‘narrow-mindedly’ rational, while Iranians disregard the ‘external’ formalities and jural practices and have a rich spiritual life. Khomyakov emphasized the role of ‘the people’, particularly ‘the people’s faith’ as opposed to ‘the individual’. He regarded the difference between Cushism and Iranism as the key cause of the struggle between Russia and Western Europe (Berdyaev, 1997, pp. 84–85). It can be seen clearly that Khomyakov’s historiosophy contains a number of deterministic positions: physiology (race), religion and grand cultural principles of Cushism and Iranism that he saw as the driving force of national history. Although Semiramis was never completed and only published posthumously, it is a remarkable example of deterministic arguments used to justify national uniqueness, which were commonplace in Slavophiles’ philosophy at the time.

Ivan Kireyevsky is considered another founder of the Slavophilia movement. He marked the ‘one-sided’ and ‘betraying’ rationality a distinctive feature of European culture and education as opposed to Russian education, which begins in the Church (Kireyevsky, 1911, p. 112). Kireyevsky’s response is a prime example of the nativist disposition of the Slavophiles: he uses such terms as ‘1000-year Russian’ and ‘new European impact’ (novoye evropeyskoye vliyaniye), and comments on the Russians’ concern about ‘forgetting’ the legacy of Russian history over the 200-year period of Western influence (1911, p. 110). Much like Khomyakov, Kireyevsky attempts to situate Russia and the West on the opposite sides of Self–Other paradigm: he presents an overview of European culture with an emphasis on individualism and
‘naked reasoning’ (1911, p. 111), ascribing it to the legacy of classical antiquity, Roman Christianity and barbarian migrations. Kireyevsky’s analysis of contemporary Western culture has been summarized by Grier (2003, pp. 36–40). In Kireyevsky’s view, as Russia did not inherit the legacy of the Western Roman Empire and was not influenced by migrations of barbarians, it was spiritually superior and untainted by excessive rationalism. Kireyevsky’s contribution to Slavophile discussions adds a historical angle to the original deterministic argument.

After the Decembrist revolt in 1825, the Russian government started making concessions to appease the growing needs of young intelligentsia, including a better codification of state laws and abolition of serfdom in 1861. From the second half of the nineteenth century, the discourse on Russian national identity took a more radical nationalistic route. Nikolay Danilevsky, a member of the Pochvenniki circle, introduced a theory of cultural–historical types and pioneered the use of biological and morphological metaphors in the comparison of cultures. He rejected the idea of world civilization and argued that the unifying factors of the nation are its language and culture, which it cannot pass on to any other nation. As each cultural–historical type followed its own path of historical development, foreign influence is seen by Danilevsky as merely a ‘fertilization supplement’ (udobrenie) (Danilevsky, 2011, p. 7). Thus, he characterized Peter the Great’s reforms in Russia as doomed to failure, as they involved an attempt to impose alien values on the Slavic world (2011, p. 153). Slavic people are characterized by Danilevsky as non-violent, which makes them fundamentally different from the Romano-Germanic civilization (2011, p. 227). He also developed a political plan for the development of the young Slavic historical-cultural type, involving unification of the Slavic world with its future capital at Constantinople (now Istanbul), ruled by an Orthodox Emperor (2011, pp. 475–521). A substantial part of Danilevsky’s work is dedicated to his observations on the decline of Europe, and to the supposedly unique features of Russian culture, such as Orthodox Christianity and peasant community (2011, p. 591), most of which reiterate Slavophiles’ position. Danilevsky suggested that Europe was alien and hostile to Russia, that European interests were directly opposite to Russia’s, and that Russian ‘courtship towards foreigners’ in an attempt to show them ‘Russia’s face’ was ludicrous (2011, p. 65). He deemed evropeinichanie (a neologism loosely translated as europeanism, or mimicking Europe) a detrimental factor to Russian indigenous culture (2011, p. 319).

Danilevsky’s work is an example of Russian national identity discourse shifting from the religious and philosophical inquiries of the 1830s and 1840s towards the aggressive nationalism of the 1870s, which defined Russia as an exclusively non-Western civilization and deemed the ‘decaying’ West to be a hostile entity. Whereas the main narrative of Russia being unique and spiritually superior to the West was being rewritten in a more nationalistic fashion, the main argument still persisted: the West is declining, while Russia is not; the West is rationalistic, while Russia is spiritual; the West is inherently ‘contaminated’ and ‘evil’, while Russia is inherently ‘good’ and ‘pure’, or needs to become ‘pure’ by purging Western practices. This reinforced stereotyped imagery of Self and Other represents the intensifying antagonism between Russia and Western Europe.

National identity has a discursive foundation: it evolves over time, adapting to historical and cultural circumstances. Western influence (French political literature and
German romanticism, especially Schelling and Hegel, was noted in Slavophiles’ works even by their contemporaries, including Pyotr Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernyshevsky. Some argue that the influence of German Romanticism on Slavophilia, despite its original merits, was undoubtable (Berdyayev, 1997, pp. 16–17). More recent publications argue that there was nothing inherently Russian in the Slavophile movement (Pastukhov, 2014), as it merely represented Russian zealotism (in Toynbee’s terms), while Westernizers represented herodian thought. Indeed, the shift from philosophical investigations of Khomyakov and others to nationalistic discussions by Danilevsky represents the intensifying zealotism of the Russian intelligentsia struggling against foreign influence. A similar standpoint is expressed regarding Japanese nihonjinron by Peter Dale, who claims that modern nihonjinron arguments rest upon Meiji herodian thought, while earlier Shinto scholars could be interpreted from a zealotist standpoint (Dale, 1986, pp. 46–48). Kokugaku scholars owed much of their methodology to the Chinese heritage they were criticizing, while the twentieth century nihonjinron authors often based their argument on a critique of Western philosophical systems. It is known that Watsuji, along with other Nishida’s disciples including Tanabe Hajime and Kuki Shūzō, studied under Husserl and Heidegger (Yusa, 2002, p. 181).

It is evident, therefore, that discourses on the difference with ‘the West’ were created by people who were well acquainted with ‘Western’ culture, literature and philosophy. Awareness of Other’s presence is crucial in Self–Other antagonism behind the discourse on Self-identity. It is no wonder that the discourse on national difference was sustained mostly by people who travelled to or lived in Western Europe and studied under Western European scholars. Japanese and Russian thinkers attempted to explain this difference on the grounds that their nation had a unique historical path and was therefore fundamentally different from the Western civilization. They also singled out several factors that supposedly made their national way of thinking unique, such as geographical location, landscape and climate, biological race or historical circumstances, particularly ancient history. Determinism and use of metaphors were characteristic traits of such arguments. As Botz-Bornstein (2007) points out, ‘Totalitarian spatial metaphors like Watsuji’s fūdo resemble the Slavophile’s sobornost’ or Nicolai Y. Danilevsky’s cultural space to the extent that all of them are said to develop out of a close relationship between nature and history’ (p. 265).

**Social Nature of Self as the Basis of Inclusive Nationalism in Russia and Japan**

Having clarified the role of national antagonism in the formation of essentialist narratives of cultural uniqueness, it is important to discuss a particular idea that stems from the narrative of uniqueness: inclusive nationalism that takes the form of imperial messianism. Inclusive nationalism thrived in Russia and Japan with colonial expansion and declined during national crises and loss of territories, after which discourses on national homogeneity gained momentum. Nineteenth century Russian messianism can be traced back to the Byzantine legacy (‘Moscow is the third Rome’) and eschatological worldview of Orthodox Christianity, through which an idea was developed that Russia’s purpose was to teach the world a lesson through her own suffering, which would eventually result in unification of nations under the auspices of the Russian Empire.
Along with discussions on Russian national uniqueness, these messianic appeals constitute the body of thought known as the Russian Idea. In regard to Japanese inclusive nationalism, a viewpoint exists that, before the post-war discourse of ‘homogenous’ Japan became predominant, Japanese thought from the Meiji until the post-war period was represented by the so-called mixed race theory, which encompassed various ethnicities (including Koreans and Taiwanese) as ‘Japanese’ to provide a philosophical justification of Japan’s rule over its colonies, and embraced an assimilation model akin to the American concept of the ‘melting pot’ (Oguma, 2002, p. 325). An important body of thought that played a role in inclusive nationalism in the Japanese Empire was the ideas of the Kyoto school, particularly Tanabe Hajime’s ‘logic of species’, also known as ‘logic of the specific’.

It is peculiar that both Russian and Japanese discourses utilize concepts transcendent to the individual that allude to unity through social interaction. Let us consider Watsuji’s model of social self. In Ethics, Watsuji develops the model of selfhood (ningen), which is constituted by notions derived from Confucian and Buddhist modes of thought, such as communal existence (kyōdō sonzai) and betweenness (aidagara). A thorough study of Watsuji’s model of ningen was conducted by Odin (1996). Watsuji argues that Western philosophical tradition, with such concepts as man, anthropos, homo and Mensch, is misinterpreting human nature due to the individualistic premise of Western concepts, as the notions mentioned above signify only an abstract individual man. In Watsuji’s view, a human being (ningen) is constituted by Self (jī) and Other (ta), which comprise the essential wholeness of an individual–society relationship (Odin, 1996, p. 55). The dichotomy of East and West is again encountered in Watsuji’s argument: he notes that the concept of individual in the West is created by rejecting society and the social self, while in the East people become social selves by rejecting their individuality (St. Clair, 2004, p. 9).

Watsuji’s critique of Western individualism is comparable to that of Russian philosophers, particularly Khomyakov and Kireyevsky, who saw individualism as the bane of Western civilization. However, another common trait of their philosophies is appraisal of the social nature of self, which the West presumably neglected. A key concept in Khomyakov’s philosophy is sobornost, a state of free, organic, spiritual unity of people based on their common Christian love for the same absolute values, a unity in a multitude of people (Khomyakov, 1886, p. 326). Sobornost is defined by communal existence in freedom and unity. Sobornost is based on collectivism and cooperation as opposed to individualism and competition. Both Khomyakov’s sobornost and Watsuji’s aidagara signify a transcendent entity that arises from communal existence, a unity achievable only through the spiritual confluence of Self and Other.

To further investigate parallels between the social nature of self in the works of Slavophiles and philosophers of the Kyoto school, it is necessary to consider Nishida’s concept of pure experience (junsui keiken) introduced in A Study of Good (trans. 1960). Pure experience is a notion of religious experience that transcends the traditional dichotomies such as subject and object, body and mind, and time and space. Pure experience is defined as a stream of consciousness that does not contain any cognitive perception of dualism, and self is a sequence of appearing and disappearing moments of this experience (Odin, 1996, p. 20). Kireyevsky’s philosophy contains a somewhat similar notion of religious experience achieved through transcending the limits of an
individual with religious intuition. In Kireyevsky’s view, the ‘internal completeness’ of human spirit, or the ‘faithful mind’ is the key to uncovering the mystery of existence. To attain this ‘highest spiritual vision’, one has to ‘understand the thought through their feeling’ and to ‘level up their thinking to sympathetic agreement with faith’, because faith is the ‘all-encompassing living focus of intellectual power’. Philosophy is ‘merely a transient movement of the human mind from the area of faith to the area of the manifold application of everyday thought’. This kind of mystical ‘high thinking’ is what Kireyevsky saw as reason, or rationality (razumnost). However, he contrasts high thinking against Western ‘rationalness’ (rassudochnost), where ‘logical, empirical cognition has subjected internal consciousness’, which resulted in the ‘decay’ of Western culture (Kireyevsky, 1984, p. 238). While rassudochnost is applicable in the natural sciences, it creates a limited, one-sided and ‘completely external’ vision of the world and is dangerous when it is not aware of its limitations and lays claim to the only way of understanding the world. It does not allow people to attain the ‘essence’ of things. Religious faith is the ‘internal core’ of a human being, and religion defines the life of a human being or a nation in all ways. The complete, ‘live’ cognition that includes not only rational, but also ethical, aesthetic and other moments subjected to the Orthodox Christian faith is the definitive characteristic of Orthodox Slavonic world, as opposed to the rationalized Western Europe.

Such ideas of mystical cognition were by no means unique to Russia or Japan, however. Some argue that Nishida’s ideas on pure experience were influenced by the Chicago school of American pragmatism, particularly by such authors as William James and Josiah Royce (Odin, 1996, p. 325). Nishida’s social self has an overlap with Feuerbach’s I-Thou dialectic. St. Clair notes that in Nishida’s I and Thou (ware to nanji), the social self (shakaiteki jiko) emerges from the dialectics of I and Thou: ‘In the fringe of consciousness surrounding this egoless state, there are I–thou relationships that engage the social self, relations with I (ware) and thou (nanji), self (jiko) and the other (ta), and the individual (kobutsu) and the environment (kankyō)’ (St. Clair, 2004, p. 13).

To investigate the relationship between inclusive nationalism and the social concepts discussed above, it is important to analyse some Darwinian underpinnings of early cosmopolitan theories in Russia and Japan. Danilevsky’s concept of cultural–historical type is another kind of a transcending social unity that represents a cultural union of people, but, unlike Khomyakov’s sobornost, this unity is based on common history and language rather than spirituality. Danilevsky acknowledges a limited number of cultural–historical types, among which are Hebrew, Arab, Indian, Greek, Roman or ancient Italian, Germanic, Slavic and Chinese. Each type follows an evolutionary path and goes through the stages of youth, adulthood and old age, the last being the end of that type. One type usually embraced one or two categories of historical activity—religious, political, socio-political and cultural (e.g. Buddhism played the definitive role in the formation of civilizations in all East and North Asia), with the exception of the emerging Slavic civilization that would embrace all of them. While other cultures were about to degenerate in their blind struggle for existence, the Slavic world would be a Messiah among them. Danilevsky’s utopian dream was to see Russia create a Slavic federation with a capital city in Constantinople (Danilevsky, 2011, p. 475–521). In his rejection of the idea of world civilization, Danilevsky compared civilizations to living organisms while the human race to him was an abstract idea. His position was that
humanity and nation are in a relationship akin to that of genus and species (2011, p. 146).

On the Japanese side, the use of biological and morphological metaphors to define the unity of people or a nation was prominent in the ideas of another important member of the Kyoto school, Tanabe Hajime. Tanabe’s logic of species (or logic of the specific) develops a model of thought resting upon a triadic dialectic of the genus (ru, the universal), the species (shu, the particular) and the individual (ko). Much like Danilevsky, who believed that all individual and social interests should be subjected to the formation of a cultural–historical type (2011, p. 129), Heisig (1995) suggests that Tanabe’s view of the species (the nation) acts as a socio-cultural substratum, which subjects the individual’s will to the needs of the ethnic group (pp. 198–224). The notion of species overcomes the dichotomy of the universal and the particular by negative mediation of an individual’s free will. As Ozaki notes, ‘the species-like substrative being, in its function of negative mediation, is necessary for an individual subject to arise in accordance with the universal genus’ (Ozaki, 1998). Tanabe’s logic of species is claimed to be an example of a theory that supports a cosmopolitan model of state and can be used to legitimize the imperialist endeavours of the Japanese government as an attempt to achieve cosmopolitan freedom (Kim, 2007, p. 166). It must be said, however, that other interpretations of Tanabe exist, such as that of Sakai (as cited in Parkes, 2011, p. 260), who stresses the importance of choice in belonging to the nation-state in Tanabe’s vision of species, which allows for further discussion.

After WW2, as Japan lost its colonies and the population subsequently became less diverse, the discourse on Japanese identity shifted from a cosmopolitan to a more ‘homogenized’ idea of Japanese nation. The notion of social self is a particular interest in post-war nihonjinron works, as it is used to illustrate Japanese national uniqueness, the complete opposite of cosmopolitanism. The Japanese are argued to be group-centred because of the interpersonal dynamics of family structure (Nakane), which is supported by a fundamental human drive of dependency (Doi) (St. Clair, 2004, p. 19). Doi’s best-known work, The Anatomy of Dependence (1985), introduces the concept of amae (dependency), which he presents as a uniquely Japanese need to engage in a dependent relationship reminiscent of that between a child and its mother. The model of social self is employed by Doi in the psychiatric description of amae as ‘the desire to deny the fact of separation that is an inevitable part of human existence, and to obliterate the pain that this separation involves’ (Doi, 1985, p. 167). In Doi’s view, amae is a more primary human drive, or motive, in comparison to the narcissistic sexual and aggressive instincts in the individualistic psychology of Freud (Odin, 1996, p. 353). Doi also makes the distinction between Western individualism (kojinshugi) and groupism (shūdanshugi), which he claims to be a characteristic feature of Japanese society (as cited in Odin, 1996, p. 353). The psychological function of amae, according to Doi, is manifested in Japanese group consciousness (shūdan-ishiki); hence, self in Doi’s terms is a nexus of dependency relationships (Odin, 1996, p. 353). Doi and Nakane’s work are built upon by Lebra, who singles out social relativism as the ethos of the Japanese nation: the Japanese, in her view, are extremely concerned about social interaction and relationships with other people (hito). Lebra links Japanese words jibun and hito to the social terms Ego (the central actor in a social relationship) and Alter (the social object of the Ego). There are visible similarities between Lebra’s notion of social pre-occupation and Watsuji’s concept of ningen, which
also defines the nature of a human being as a two-fold construct (ji and ta, or Self and Other) and places emphasis on communal existence. Similar to Watsuji, who maintains that Self resides in betweenness with the Other (an ‘empty self’), Lebra defines this ambiguity and refers to it as ‘social preoccupation’ (Lebra, 1976, p. 2).

Similar transformations occurred in the Russian national identity discourse as the country was going through a political crisis that led to less cosmopolitan views of the Russian nation. The year 1881 marked another important change in Russian history: tsar Alexander II was assassinated by members of a group Narodnaya Volya (Will of the People), a radical socialist organization that, like Pochvenniki, supported closer relations between intelligentsia and the common folk. The new emperor, Alexander III, was a reactionary ruler who reversed many of the previous progressive reforms of his predecessor, and introduced stronger censorship. Simultaneously, a reactionary standpoint emerged among the Russian intelligentsia. Vladimir Solovyov, a prominent nineteenth century philosopher who had commented on both Slavophiles and Westernizers, gave a lecture in French entitled the Russian Idea in 1887 (published in Russian in 1888) in an attempt to outline the meaning of Russia’s existence in world history and explain it to the Western European audience.

Solovyov took an opposite standpoint from that of Danilevsky: he believed in the world civilization and compared it to a living organism, whose organs were represented by different nations (Solovyov, 1999, p. 623). In Solovyov’s view, the entire human race is a social organism (‘subnational unity’, which he claims is an irrefutable religious truth), and each nation has ‘an organic function’ that is pre-determined by God. It was, therefore, only natural for each nation to have a distinct historical mission, much like a function given to different parts of the body. Ultimately, all nations would be reunited under a grand principle, which Solovyov saw in ecumenic church (Vselenskaya Tserkov) (1999, p. 631). Although Solovyov condemned nationalism and deemed it as detrimental to a nation as egoism is to an individual, he supported ecumenic unification of all nations. In his view, this unification of Christian ‘truth’ supports the existence of nations and their rights and freedoms as opposed to nationalism that divides and pits nations against each other (1999, p. 632).

This paradoxical self-reflection that opposes aggressive nationalism but at the same time reinforces the idea of Russian specificity and its messianic mission to reunite the world is a testament to the confusion that was taking place in the discourse situated around the term the Russian idea in the nineteenth century. National identity discourse in Russia went from the feeling of inferiority to the West to religious and philosophical self-reflections on national uniqueness to aggressive nationalism, and then took a step backwards to rethink Russia’s meaning in world history in a philosophical sense. Japanese self-reflections followed a largely similar pattern: from discussions on the ‘true heart’ of the Japanese to cosmopolitan ideas of the Great Japanese Empire, which subsided in the post-war period, when discourses on Japanese uniqueness took a more ‘homogenized’ turn.

Conclusion

National identity’s discursive basis evolves and adapts to historical circumstances through different narratives. External threat in the form of westernization is one of such circumstances. In both Russia and Japan, there were heated debates over the
areas and the extent to which Western influence should be embraced, and there were groups who condemned westernization and argued for a ‘revival’ through returning to values and practices derived from the country’s earlier history.

Nativist discourses such as *kokugaku* and early Slavophilia and discourses on national uniqueness tend to emerge at the time when the nation’s sovereignty faces a potential threat. For instance, Tanaka (1993) argues that the discourse on Japanese national uniqueness emerged from the need for the consolidation of Japan as a nation endangered by the sense of social disintegration attributed to Western influence in the Taisho period (as cited in Bukh, 2010, p. 17). More integrative nationalism appears as the thinkers embrace the idea of superiority of their nation to justify the colonial endeavours of the state. Placed at the opposite ends of the offence-defense spectrum, both nativism and imperialism are the result of a national antagonism between Self-nation and Other-nation(s), and aim to protect and reinforce Self’s identity facing an external threat. To achieve this goal, an effort is made to argue for Self’s uniqueness through deterministic positions. Apart from historical and geographical determinism, Russian and Japanese thinkers have used transcending social categories to emphasize the importance of communal existence, which supposedly made their nation unique and/or superior to Other.

It is not my intention, however, to argue that there is some overarching ‘grand law’ that governs the creation of such narratives and makes their prediction easy. It is important to note that all narratives discussed in this article were products of their time and historical circumstances, usually among many alternatives. *Kokugaku* and early Slavophilia, for instance, developed in the context of a protest response rather than a state-embraced ideology, and were criticized by their contemporary opponents. As Smith (1991) notes, it is difficult to trace a direct link between the intellectuals engaged in a national discourse and nationalism, and it is likely that such discourses develop in response to challenges posed by the clash of the traditional and the modern, in their specific context (pp. 95–96). It is remarkable nevertheless that intellectuals of Russia and Japan, despite their vastly different historical, cultural and geopolitical circumstances, have developed comparable narratives of imperialism and national uniqueness. This suggests that there may be mutual influence between discourse on national identity and state policy, particularly in regard to the colonization of other nations by colonial powers.

**Notes**

1. My usage of this term is derived from the term ‘antagonism’ (limit of social objectivity) used by a Post-Marxist critic Ernesto Laclau. Laclau defined identity as a result of an antagonism between social forces. A common example of an antagonism would be political struggle between peasants and landowners, two complete groups with their identities shaped by political tension. It is important to note that antagonism does not exclusively mean direct opposition: The subjects in an antagonistic relationship do not necessarily have to be complete opposites or have essentially different traits (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp. 124–125).

2. *Pochvenniki* were a group of Russian intellectuals who shared Fyodor Dostoevsky’s idea of national identity formed by ‘taking from the soil’: returning to one’s homeland and indigenous practices. Their mouthpiece was the *Vremya* (Time) periodical, authored and published by Dostoyevsky himself.
3. Zealotism (archaism invoked by foreign pressure, appeals to nativism) and herodianism (cosmopolitanism, the principle that the most effective way to guard against the danger of the unknown is to master its secret) are terms that identify two conflicting tendencies occurring in a society in response to the danger of being overwhelmed by a more powerful and mature civilization. The terms were originally introduced by Toynbee to describe the struggle between the Western civilization and the Islamic world (Toynbee, 1948).

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