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Histoire du Japon moderne et contemporain : permanences et ruptures

« The Edo Era in the History of Japanese Nationalism »

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Abstract

Recently nationalism seems to rise in Japan. On the other hand, there are people who criticize that trend. When they feel uneasy about rise of nationalism, what they keep in mind is the history that nationalism before and during World War II led Japan to the ruin. What was a trait of nationalism in pre-war Japan, and how was it formed?

In this presentation, I deal with the formative period of Japanese nationalism. It is only a beginning of the history of pre-war Japanese nationalism, but I think it put seals on things to come. First, I consider a nationalist movement since the coming of the U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry's fleet in 1853. Especially I focus on the formation of the nation and a state in Japan. In conclusion I point out that building of a united state was relatively easy, but formation of the nation was difficult. So the Meiji government made efforts to make the nation as the subject of the emperor.

Second, I explain the influence of the Edo era on Japanese nationalism. If a nationalist movement in Japan started in the late of the Edo era, the environment that produced it had to be formed already during the Edo era. I insist that people of the Edo era had national consciousness and had consciousness to belong to a community which shared the same culture, though Japan of those days was under the national seclusion and feudalism which divided Japanese society. On the other hand, the class system and class consciousness were stiff. The former made it easy to build a united state, and the latter made it difficult to form the nation after the Meiji Restoration.