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MYTH AND MYTHOLOGIZATION
IN IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS.
THE MYTHOLOGIZATION OF JAPANESE IDENTITY
IN THE MEIJI PERIOD

There is no natural phenomenon and no phenomenon of human life that is not capable of a mythical interpretation, and which does not call for such an interpretation.

Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*

Abstract

Is myth a word or a thought? Searching for the etymological roots shows that it is both. However, does it really exhaust all the possible understandings of the myth and does it enable the grasp of its multiple usages? Answering those questions seems very important not only because we do not have the precise definition of a myth but mainly for that reason that we often fail to notice that it functions in all the societies and political regimes playing quite a vital role at the same time. The purpose of this paper is not only sketching a few possible answers but also their exemplification through the example of Japan in the period of Meiji. The choice of that example results from that fact it is a conspicuous example of the way in which political elites are engaged in creating symbols and rituals and in shaping national awareness. The examples of the process of shaping national identity presented in this paper are focused on demonstrating two fundamental myths related to the Emperor, the aim of which was to consolidate the national identity.

Key words: myth; mythology; nation; Japan; Meiji period; emperor's-politics

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Streszczenie

Czy mit to słowo, czy myśl? Etymologicznie okazuje się jednym i drugim. Jednakże czy wyczerpuje to możliwe rozumienia mitu oraz umożliwia uchwycenie jego rozlicznych zastosowań? Odpowiedzi na te pytania wydają się niezwykle ważne nie tylko dlatego, że nie posiadamy precyzyjnej definicji mitu, lecz przede wszystkim z tego względu, że często nie dostrzegamy, że funkcjonuje on we wszystkich społeczeństwach i systemach politycznych, pełniąc w nich niezwykle ważne role. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest nie tylko zarysowanie możliwych odpowiedzi, lecz także ich egzemplifikacja na przykładzie Japonii w okresie Meiji. Wybór tego przypadku wynika z tego, że stanowi on czytelny przykład tego, w jaki sposób elity polityczne angażują się w kreowanie symboli i rytuałów oraz kształtowanie świadomości narodowej. Przedstawione w artykule przykłady procesu kształtowania tożsamości narodowej skupione są na ukazaniu dwóch podstawowych mitów związanych z cesarzem, których zadaniem było konsolidowanie tożsamości narodowej.

Wyrazy kluczowe: mit; mitologia; naród; Japonia; okres Meiji; polityka cesarza

MYTHOS AND LÓGOS – INTRODUCTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM “MYTH”

Describing and analyzing the history of ideas and concepts that pave the development of reflection over human beings is one of the fundamental tasks humanities and social science present us with. Yet, it is burdened—which is to be emphasized—with many difficulties resulting not only from the complexity of that very task but also from the nature of the concepts themselves, the concept many a time being characterized with ambiguity. Due to that fact, developing the unanimity as to the method of research starts with (and sometimes terminates with) the attempt to uniformly understand the concepts in use. Such situations give rise to posing questions concerning the status of scientific epistemology, and to put it more mildly, to posing questions concerning the construction of unequivocal definitions necessary to describe and understand the reality under research. Though, the answers acquired magnify the incoherent picture of science being broken into postmodern intransparencies and the vagueness of cognition (cf. Domańska, 2005; White, 2000). On the other hand, the attempts to systematize the methodologies used in humanities and social science contribute to the determination of such a vision of science that the latter is considered doubtful. (cf. Lakatos, 1987, p. 7). In the maze of discussions, running for a few dozen years now, it may be worthwhile to consider whether we need clear-cut definitions and whether they will come in handy on the plane of humanities and social science to explore intransparent fragments of reality and the ones originating from the cultures other than European. That is why it is worthwhile to recollect the utterance by Clifford Geertz saying that “definitions establish nothing, in themselves they do, if they are carefully enough constructed, provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought” (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

One of the ambiguous concepts is “myth,” which – as pointed out by Ernst Cassirer – to an exceptional degree „to be a mere chaos – a shapeless mass of incoherent ideas”

(Cassirer, 1962, p. 137). That chaos largely results from that fact that the meaning and the context of this concept varied across ages. "Myth" (among other ambiguous concepts) is characterized by the fact that contradictory descriptive values are attributed to it. Colloquially speaking, it is conceived of as the synonym of falsity (Czeremski, 2009, p. 15) or the story about Gods and their deeds as well as the origins of the universe and of humans (Trzciński, 2006, p. 10). Pointing to its etymology might give us some assistance to highlight the complexity of the contents of "myth." It is commonly agreed that it comes from Greek *μῦθος* (*mythos*) and this is where usually—what must be emphasized—the study of its etymology ends (cf. Marszałek, 2010, p. 10).¹ Obtaining the earliest contexts and, if it is possible at all, texts in which the word occurred might provide interesting explanations of the meanings the word originally had. This task is important as much as the dissonance between *mythos* and *λόγος* (*lógos*) was solved in the philosophical discourse due to Heraclitus' considerations. Heraclitus was inclined in favor of the latter, which position was later on held on to by Plato himself. It happened at least for this reason that *lógos* was understood not only as a "word" with its lexical meaning but was identified with "speaking", "sense" and "reason" (cf. Heidegger, 1998, p. 106; Lincoln, 1999, p. 3). The significance of that change should be traced back to the fact that first it was translated as "word" or "speech", and second, the reasons and the approximate time when these changes were introduced are still unknown to us. It means that, as it is commonly believed, having replaced *mythos* with *lógos*, the distinction was drawn into uttered content being true and universal and on the other hand false (in the weaker form, the latter was characterized by narrativeness). The tension caused by the juxtaposition of truth and falsity and of factuality and narrativeness gave rise to the elimination from the analyses this detail that *mythos* originally had very close sense to *lógos*. In *What we Called Thinking* by Martin Heidegger we can read a very interesting fragment about the relation between *mythos* and *logos*:

Myth means the telling word. For the Greeks, to tell is to lay bare and make appear – both the appearance and that which has its essence in the appearance, its epiphany. *Mythos* is what has its essence in its telling – what is apparent in the unconcealedness [*Unverborgenheit* – M. L.] of its appeal. The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being. *Logos* says the same; *mythos* and *logos* are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such; on the contrary, the early Greek thinkers (Parmenides, fragment 8) are precisely the ones to uses *mythos* and *logos* become separated and opposed only at the point where neither *mythos* nor *logos* can keep to its original nature. In Plato's work, this separation has already taken place. Historians and philologists, by virtue of a prejudice which modern rationalism adopted from Platonism, imagine that *mythos* was destroyed by *logos*. But nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the God's withdrawal (Heidegger, 1976, p. 10).

The demonstration of the correctness of Heidegger's thesis related to the compatibility of *mythos* and *lógos* is not an easy task and it requires answering the question whether Greeks really did not distinguish between truth and falsity in case of speaking. It is the works by Bruce Lincoln that contradicts this state of affairs. The author on the basis

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¹ According to Andrzej P. Kowalski, the word "myth" is related to the Polish word *mysleć* (think) (Kowalski, 2014, p. 130). This remark by Kowalski concerns reconstructional works on pre-Indo-European, thanks to which we can push the limit of tracing the origins of "myth" further back into the past. It transpires that the source for not only the Greek word but also for the other languages from Indo-European languages, and especially for Slavic languages, is **muHdʰ-* (cf. Derksen, 2008, p. 337). Alluding to the relation, through **muHdʰ-*, Greek *mythos* with proto-Slavic **mъsьlъ* (ros. **мысль**, pol. *mysl*), we can demonstrate that one of the main senses preserved is the reference to the thought, word, idea (cf. Derksen, 2008, p. 337).

of analyses – however scant they were – of the earliest Greek texts suggests that it was already in Homer’s and Hesiod’s work that the distinction was operative. Still, then it was *lógos* that meant falsity (or relatively narrativeness) and *mythos* signified truth (Lincoln, 1999, pp. 5–8; Czeremski 2009, pp. 16–17). Complementing that analysis with the earlier work by Heidegger dedicated to Heraclitus, we can add that *lógos* did not originally refer to “word” but its source meaning was “laying,” “assembling,” “stacking” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 100).² It might mean that *lógos* did not have to refer to falsity but it did refer to the creative transfer of content (Havelock, 2007, p. 125). Thus, it might have complemented *mythos*, instead of being its opposite. Apart from that, even if it had proved that Heidegger was wrong, his intuition related to undermining the commonly shared way of thinking about a myth as independent of truth-falsity dichotomy seems extraordinarily important and inspiring.

Additionally, it is worthwhile to pay attention at least to three threads that call for further studies so that we could acquire a more complete picture of the problem of interest to us. The first one is the necessity to notice the significance of philosophical reflection in ancient Greece over the meaning of some concepts. It is because, as a consequence, the concepts diametrically changed their meanings and the later-acquired meanings soon became dominant thus abolishing the former meanings. That is exactly what happened to the concept of “myth.” The second thread is that, recollecting the words by Cassirer, one should indicate the change that took place when one departed from the etymological sense, that is highlighting the content through speech, and shifted into explanatory and ordering functions of the myth. Third, it is to be recalled that the dispute is about the Greek word which made a world-wide career, having pushed away all the other categories occurring in all the non-European societies under research. What is interesting is also the fact that one has not yet taken up the analysis of all the words approximating the Greek “myth” occurring in important culture-forming societies and their respective languages, such as Sumerian (and Akkadian), Egyptian, Hebrew, Sanskrit or Chinese. Through research of etymological investigations of this concept and due to the attempts to grasp the functions performed by them in different cultures, we will be able to better specify what it really is. For the sake of the present paper, I will assume the working definition of “myth” as the basic motif or a piece of narrative related to the explanation of the world surrounding us (both the physical and the social one), of us human beings and of our conduct. And, depending on the context in which it occurs, it plays a different role and thus has a different meaning.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MYTH AND MYTHOLOGY

Many a time, in the primary literature there was the problem raised which concerned the significance of romanticism for shaping national awareness and nationalism. In the context of the subject of interest of us, we can indicate the author of the crucial works dedicated to the concept of “nation” as well as one of the first philosopher who attempted to rehabilitate the concept of “myth” and “mythology” as the most fundamental and the most needed forms of experiencing the reality by a human being (Siemek, 2011, p. 234). Who

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² Similarly to the case of the hypothetical origin of the Greek word *mythos* apparently derived from pre-Indo-European **muHd-* *lógos* is supposed to come from pre-Indo-European **leǵ-*, which also meant “assembling” (cf. Pokorny, 2007, p. 1854).

we imply is one of the three great German transcendental idealists Friedrich W. J. Schelling, in the work of whom *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (*Historische-kritische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, 1842) we can read that "each nation exists as such only when it decides upon and determines its mythology" (Schelling, 2009, p. 19). Schelling's pointing to the inseparable relation between mythology and a nation inclines us to pose the question not so much about the understanding of the myth and the nation but as about the manner in which a given ethnic group in the process of the acquisition of national awareness designs the narratives about itself and what threads these narratives touch upon. And what is specific about the set of these narratives referred to as mythology? The answers to this question, the former being even superficial, might contribute to understanding the fact that the process of constructing national identity is exceptionally complex and it is difficult to specify its determinants.

Systematizing our considerations, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the last question related to the distinction between a myth and mythology. This issue might seem trivial, considering the fact that even among the theoreticians dealing with myths, these concepts are regarded as coinciding and they are used interchangeably depending on the context of the discourse. It might be noticed mainly in the works devoted to the mythologies of world cultures in which the theoretical part concerns only the attempts to define what "a myth" is (cf. Gieysztor, 2006, pp. 23–31; Graves, 2009, pp. 6–7). In this respect, mythology should be considered a bunch of myths present in the consciousness of a given society (or societies) and regarded as representative of their way of thinking about themselves and their surrounding (both social and the physical one). However, tracing the contexts in which the particular mythologies occurred, mostly in the written and not the oral form, it must be stated that their said representativeness, containing coherence, is not so clear-cut after all. What is more, there are some motifs typical of different groups inhabiting a given territory that appear in these contexts. Furthermore, it is precisely because of these contexts that we can distinguish at least four types of mythologies performing various functions in given cultures:

- (1) in terms of the oral function a set of myths is regarded as the most "rudimentary form of expressing the reality" (Szyjewski, 2009, p. XXI);
- (2) as a set of myths contained in the texts having scant religious significance or already deprived of it, as well as in the epic poetry or dynasty chronicles, etc.;
- (3) as the popular set of myths regarded as representative of a given culture;
- (4) as a set of myths consolidating national identity.

Conducting a more in-depth studies over the enumerated types of mythologies should contribute to a more complete understanding of what it is and what significance myths have for it. However, due to the subject of interest to us, points (2) and (4) are of utmost importance to us. With a great degree of probability, we might posit that the majority of the world texts known to us and regarded as mythological operated within specific societies and concerned, apart from cosmological hints, mainly the explanation of the origins of a given group and the legitimacy of political power and did not concern a human being as such. That is why we should slightly modify the reception of myth and instead focus on the modes of the presence of specific social groups within a mythological narration of the second type. These narrations are characterized by, which is worth stressing, the pickiness of motifs and sometimes by an almost manipulative choice of the content within them. This situation is particularly conspicuous in the case of national mythologies, the main goal of which is the official consolidation of a given group and not reiteration

of the universal stories related to the human fate. In these stories, myths are treated as a “political formula” by dint of which in the process of shaping national identity – as stressed by Claudio Martinelli—political elites justify their power (Martinelli, 2009, p. 183). The aim of myths thus understood, which we refer to as national ones, is the justification of the common origins of a social group (here understood as the nation) and many a time the consolidation on the basis of the common calling.³

Referring to what Maria Skladankowa said and modifying her words slightly, we can state that official mythologies were constructed (and still are) mainly when a given society was (or still is) in a particular position – somehow at the crossroads of history (Skladankowa, 1989, p. 5). What we can understand by it is that due to taking heed of the context in which national mythologies were created (or still are), it is possible to grasp the differences in exploiting the myths and endowing them with new senses. Noticing the said changes mainly concern understanding the way in which political elites create the opinions on themselves and on society and they answer two fundamental questions: who we are and who we want to be today, here and now and tomorrow (Leder, 2014, p. 8). However, the most important aspect of national narratives – both the contemporary ones and the ones considered from the historical viewpoint – is that the mythical motifs reiterated within them acquire a new and more lively dimension. Namely, having a chance to become, as Bronisław Malinowski put it “not merely a story told but a reality lived” (Malinowski, 1974, p. 100). Thanks to that, the mythologies of type four might remind us of, but only to quite a narrow degree, the mythologies of type one as essentially related to human activity and emotions. Thus acquiring the exceptional force in influencing the participants of the discourse both in terms of consolidation and the reproduction of national identity. And thanks to the fact that national mythologies consist of relatively simple and acceptable patterns, for example the distinction into us and them or the common origins and the value and pride of representing them.

JAPANESE NATIONAL MYTHOLOGY IN THE MEIJI PERIOD

Before we move on to make our considerations more detailed it is worthwhile to notice three important statements. First, it is worth taking heed of the fact that the case of Japan in the Meiji period is an exquisite example, almost a clinical one, of the manner in which national mythologies are created and to what degree it is possible to invent new traditions. Second, further consideration will be related to the official national mythology that was created in Japan in the period of Meiji. The official mythology means the one created by Japanese political elites in order to legitimize their power and the new political regime, the power having proved helpful in creating and then consolidating national identity among the Japanese. Eventually, third, it is telling that in the primary literature it often is the period of Meiji (1868-1912) that is pointed to as the commencing point for shaping the national identity of Japan. It must be added that in the so-far analyses of that process there accidentally occurred an in-depth analysis of the changes that took place at that time as well as the causes thereof. It also relates to the nature of the political transformation

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³ In the case of national myths so understood, the threads of universal nature might occur, however rarely, and they will not have any higher significance as opposed to the threads related to the common origins of the group.

as a result of which, the concept of “Japanese nation” appeared in the political discourse. Furthermore, to better grasp the nature of political changes, it is justifiable to make some remarks concerning those threads of Japanese culture that had an important bearing on the nature of national identity in Japan. It is especially true of myths which since the period of Meiji have assumed the political significance and have been validated and reproduced – to a large degree – till the contemporary times. Pointing at the period of Meiji as the exceptional period in the history of Japan has a two-fold meaning. The most obvious one from the political point of view was the political transformation as a result of which Japan became the modern constitutional monarchy; the then elites were replaced and a series of changes of the political, economic, social and cultural nature were introduced, all of them being modeled according to Western examples. The second point of significance, after all following from the first one, can be detected in “the commencing point” for modern Japan. It is to be assumed that political changes did not have to, and in fact they did not in many aspects of then Japanese reality, align with the social and cultural transformations. What is meant by that is also that the political transformation did not cause the immediate changes in the way the Japanese conceived of themselves and their surroundings. In many cases, they were not changed at all. That is why understanding year 1868 as a starting point is a very educational case from the cultural but not a historical point of view.

Considering the significance of the “starting point” in the context of shaping the national identity, it is worthwhile to notice that it is not about historical determination of the commencing point but it is about its ritual determination. In this sense, we can speak of the “myth of the origins,” which Japanese elites legitimizing the implemented changes alluded to. The case of Japan proves to be a typical example of exploiting the political myths for the sake of legitimizing political power through clear and ritualized departure from the previous power (cf. Kampka, 2008, p. 262). It is to be emphasized that the political transformation was not supposed to change the awareness among the Japanese and to constitute them as “nation” but to replace the elite and legitimize the new one. That is why the events preceding the enthronement of the Emperor of Meiji might be considered *coup d'état*, the events apart from military actions called for the properly prepared political rituals and their respective justifications in the form of properly chosen myths. In the first two decades of the period of Meiji, we can distinguish two myths being the ideological foundation to the official mythology, which quite shortly became the basis for the Japanese national identity. In the chronological order, they were: the already mentioned “myth of the origins” and the “myth of the sovereign.” It must be added that these myths were inseparable and they justified one another.

What gives testimony to the deliberate creation by then Japanese political elites of the “myth of the origins” and its use in the political discourse is the assumption of the official terms related to the events dating back from 1868. What is meant here is “Meiji restoration” (*Meiji ishin*), the aim of which was to underline the ritual significance of that event. Introducing the term “restoration,” Japanese reformers mainly wanted to attract people’s attention to the Emperor as a legitimate sovereign, who were to legitimize new political elites and the political transformation. In this way, Japanese ideologists created “the myth of a sovereign” bases on the mythological narration about the Emperor known since the earlier ages. Referring to *coup d'état* with the Japanese word *ishin* (literally: restoration⁴) one used the Confucian framework, not in the proper sense though, namely of searching for the justification into Golden Age. In this case, it was about to show that in

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⁴ In dictionaries, the word *ishin* is translated as “restoration,” “revolution” but also as “reform.” Additionally, it usually refers to restoration of Meiji (cf. Monzeler & Tumanov, 1944, p. 435).

the past Japan possessed something of utmost importance which was to be recovered. That was the institution of imperial power, which was to be revitalized so that “new Japan” was grounded upon the traditional and appropriate foundations.

The said ambiguity in using Confucian models involved the fact that before one started to use the term *ishin*, to refer to the nature of the changes, the term *ōseki fukko* was used, which should translated as restauration of ancient times or restauration of imperial rule (cf. Harootunian, 1989, p. 255; Beasley, 1989, p. 624).⁵ What is interesting is the fact that pro-imperial reformers already in Edo period quite shortly replaced *ōseki fukko* with *ishin*, the sense of the latter did not refer only to the past but also to the future.⁶ What consequently caused the change of the significance of the transformations and of the search for the source of justifications for them? That change resulted from the need for reconciliation of Japan receptivity to contacts with Western countries with the nativistic 19th century ideology. For this reason, the “myth of the origins” expressed in *Meiji ishin* required a proper justification which subsumed the “myth of sovereign” exemplified by the Emperor of Meiji. Having at their disposal those two myths, Japanese ideologists created the new national mythology combining the past and the receptivity to changes. The telling example of such understanding of new policy was the assumption of the term for a new era and the name of the Emperor,⁷ that is Meiji. Depending on the context, the word Meiji meant “enlightened rules” or “enlightened ruler.” It is worth adding that contained within that word the morpheme *mei*, apart from “enlightenment” and “clarity” also means “development” and “morrow.” Thanks to that “enlightened rules or sovereign” were to represent the progress of Japanese policies aimed at westernization and simultaneous preservation of imperial dynasty. Recollecting the words uttered by Paul Connerton, that “all beginnings contain an element of recollection” (Connerton, 1989, p. 6), we can indicate that the case of the 19th century Japan neatly fit that framework. The ideological operations of then Japanese politicians expressed in *Meiji ishin* contributed to the creation of the new official national mythology based on the myths well-known in imperial court circles. The novelty in the presentation of the myths already existent in Japan was endowing them with the status of being “validated”, thus becoming the basis not only of the legitimacy of imperial power but also of the Japanese national identity. The source of references for Japanese ideologists validating the Emperor (within constitutional monarchy) as the rightful and the exclusive sovereign are exceptionally conspicuous and we can point to them with ease. These include in order: *Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters, 712)*, *Nihongi (The Chronicles of Japan, 720)* and *Jinnō Shōtōki (Chronicles of the Authentic Lineages of the Divine Emperors, 1339)* of Kitabatake Chikafusa, and also later *Shinron (New Theses, 1825)* written by Aizawa Seishisai. The leitmotif occurring in all these works was the presentation of the divine origin of the Emperor and Japan itself and the determination of Pantheon of Gods, which was attributed the national significance to in the 19th century. Thus, there was the operative belief that the imperial family is directly descended from the goddess Amaterasu, whereas the Emperor Meiji was supposed to be 122th descendant of the legendary Emperor Jinmu – the grandson of the said goddess. And that is why Emperors of that dynasty exclusively might wield

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⁵ It is worth adding that in the past one used that pattern connected with the demonstration of the legitimacy of imperial power through its “restauration.” Namely, to refer to “Kemmu restauration” during the period of Kamakura, the Chinese term *chūkō* referring to the restauration of the old imperial regime (cf. Goble, 1996, p. xii).

⁶ It is worth noting that the very word *ishin* consists of two symbols *i* and *shin* (and also *atara* or *ara*). The former (that is *i*) means “bind” or “hold”, whereas the latter, *shin* means: “new,” “modern,” “fresh,” and “next.”

⁷ The names, which, according to the Japanese tradition, he assumed only after his death.

power in Japan. Thus, the myths which served as the justification of the rituals related to the Emperor coupled with the pantheon of the Gods of that lineage constituted the basis for the accepted national mythology. On the other hand, *Kojiki* officially became the unquestionable source of knowledge on the past of Japan. The process of mythologization of national identity was not reduced to including the myths of new rules in the political and public discourse but it did involve enabling, thanks to them, the participation in the extraordinary events and rituals. In the face of the fusion of politics with the mythological threads, we can point to the most important manifestations of their presence. These are mainly *The Constitution of the Empire of Japan (Dai Nippon Teikoku Kenpō, 1890)* and *The Imperial Rescript on Education (Kyōiku ni Kansuru Chokugo, 1890)* as well as moving the capital city from Kyoto to Tokyo, admitting the national anthem of Japan and making use of the symbols related to the Emperor. What should be also enumerated is fixing national holidays and giving shinto shrines, connected with the ancestral imperial Gods, the nationwide significance. The factor which served as the common ground to both the texts and the concomitant artifacts was its reference to the Emperor. It all constituted the whole corpus of mythological narrations, which started to function not merely as a text but first and foremost started to fill the social space with symbols and rituals.

The case of *Meiji Constitution* might be regarded as a telling example of the manner in which and the degree to which mythological threads might constitute a foundation for legal acts of the utmost importance. Another striking fact is that Constitution fell into the category of the “myth of the origins” because it was supposed to play the role of the symbolic commencing of the new period in the history of Japan and at the same time serve as a legitimizing force for it (cf. Lisiecki, 2006, p. 210). It is not an accident either that the date of promulgating the Constitution, which was fixed on 11 February 1898,⁸ that coincided with the establishment in the Meiji period of the state holiday called National Foundation Day (*kigensetsu* or *kenkoku kinen no hi*) connected with commemorating the founding of the Yamato dynasty by Emperor Jinmu (Hardacre, 1989, p. 101; Hide-masa, 2011, p. 122). Next references to the “myth of sovereign” can be found in the text of the Constitution itself, where already in the *Preamble (Joyu)*, there are references to the divine origins of the Emperor and being predestined to wield power in Japan:

Having, by virtue of the glories of Our Ancestors, ascended the throne of a lineal succession unbroken for ages eternal; desiring to promote the welfare of, and to give development to the moral and intellectual faculties of Our beloved subjects, the very same that have been favored with the benevolent care and affectionate vigilance of Our Ancestors; and hoping to maintain the prosperity of the State (*The Constitution of the Empire of Japan; Dai Nippon Teikoku Kenpō*).

The development of the threads sketched in the *Preamble* can be found in the first section of the Constitution called *The Emperor (Tennō)*, in which as many as 17 articles (out of which three have direct references to the myth of his divine origins) are devoted to the Emperor:

Article 1. The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.⁹ (...)
Article 3. The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.

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⁸ According to the legends contained in *Nihongi*, Jinmu became Emperor on 11 February 660 BC.

⁹ According to Ben-Ami Schillony “it was the first time that a modern official document used phrase *banssei ikki* (a line unbroken for ages eternal)” (Schillony, 2005, p. 10).

Article 4. The Emperor is the head of the Empire, combining in Himself the rights of sovereignty, and exercises them, according to the provisions of the present Constitution.
(*The Constitution of the Empire of Japan; Dai Nippon Teikoku Kenpō*).

We should bear in mind that the constitution was of the legal-political nature, in which the references to the goddess Amaterasu and her grandson, the legendary Emperor Jimmu did have nation-forming references yet. In that context, a much greater ideological significance was ascribed to *The Imperial Rescript on Education*, which already had the significance related to shaping national identity of Japan (cf. Lisiecki, 2010, pp. 42–43). The consolidating factor was obviously the Emperor, who „forced“ all the Japanese people, as his subjects, to fulfill his will. We read in it what follows:

Know ye, Our Subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education. Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial state; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

The way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may all attain to the same virtue (*The Imperial Rescript on Education*, 1964).

Apart from the references to Amaterasu as a progenitor of the imperial dynasty, its significance lies in the fact that it was directly oriented at the subjects (*shinmin*). The subjects, in turn, operating in the realm of Confucian vertical relation of a ruler-subject were to acquire the awareness of who wields power and why. And most importantly, that they together constitute a community operative within a country called Japan (being of the equally divine origins).

The additional form of strengthening the myths related to the Emperor and hereby strengthening the whole official mythology was the participation in national holidays, connected with, as we remember, the Emperor and his ancestors. What also strengthened the myths was the participation in obligatory assemblies in public institutions in honor of the Emperor, including the recitation of the slogan *bansei ikki* (Schillony, 2005, p. 10; cf. Kość, 2001, p. 90). Those gestures also included paying homage to the portraits of the Emperor of Meiji and the copy of *The Imperial Rescript on Education*, which served as the icon of the Emperor (Lisiecki, 2010, pp. 176–177). What should be also included in the list of artifacts exploited for the sake of consolidating the national identity is the recognition of the song *Kimigayo* as the Japanese anthem, the song having some references to the personage of the Emperor.¹⁰ Apart from the enumerated artifacts, the strengthen-

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¹⁰ The text of the Japanese national anthem:
"May your reign
Continue for a thousand, eight thousand generations,
Until the pebbles

ing of the national identity was conducted within politicalization of shinto (*kokka shintō*), whose highest priest was the Emperor himself. It took place within the religious temples, which were ordered according to the relations with the cult of the imperial ancestral Gods. Thus, such places as Ise Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine became not only the place of the religious cult but first and foremost the governmental agendas of endorsing the official policy as well as the places of use when it came to the process of the consolidation of national identity (cf. Hardacre, 1989, pp. 83–99).¹¹

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the use of myths related to the Emperor and his divine ancestors in the nation-forming process, we can notice that it is typical of the majority of societies which tried to demonstrate (be it in the realm of culture or politics) that they are characterized by coherence and the relations to the past. This fact was taken heed of by Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky, who say that

Each culture creates its own model of endurance and the continuity of its memories. The model corresponds with the concept of maximal extendibility in time and practically is “eternal” in a given culture. Because culture regards itself as existent on the basis of identifying itself with the constant norm of its memories, the relation between the continuity of memories and the continuity of existence is usually that of identity. (...) For this reason, culture is not often oriented at knowledge on the past: the future is conceived of as time stopped: as a lasting “now” (...) (Lotman & Uspieński, 1977, p. 152).

Building the “model of endurance,” as mentioned by Lotman and Uspensky, in the case of Japan during the period of Meiji, proves to be exactly corresponding with what we described as Japanese national mythology, the mythology consisting of the well-chosen motifs, which made an impression of ideological anchoring in the “eternity,” understood as the historical continuation of events from *in illo tempore* through the present into the future. The factor conditioning the coherence of mythological narrations was the Emperor Meiji but not through his political actions but through the ideological superstructure. The latter was expressed, as we remember, in the very name of the Emperor as well as in the rituals related to the establishment of the connection between legendary times and the consolidation of the awareness of Japanese people as the community.

In the context of our subject, it is worthwhile to come back to theoretical considerations from the beginning of the paper. Their significance should be attributed to the need to rethink what a myth and mythology really are. On the basis of so-far consideration, we are not as much left without the answer as – what follows from the very nature of a “myth” – we are left with the its understanding narrowed down to the examples originating in Western societies. Furthermore, including into our considerations the cases of contemporary societies should help to understand that we should not restrict ourselves to analyze myths and mythological narrations in the texts available to us. Rather, we

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Grow into boulders
Lush with moss” (Hood, 2004, p. 166).

¹¹ We can add that Ise Shrine was dedicated to the cult of the goddess Amaterasu- the progenitor of the imperial house. On the other hand, Yasukuni Shrine was dedicated to the warriors and soldiers deceased fighting in the name of the Emperor. Additionally, this is the place commemorating Kusanogi Masahige, the medieval warrior, who was ascended to the rank of a national hero by then political elites (cf. Breen, 2008, p. 12; Lisiecki, 2013, p. 75).

should pay a closer attention to their functioning in the political and social life. It is because thanks to that, we can convince ourselves that myths might have some significance critical to our orientation in the words, and thus they must be characterized by liveliness and inalienability of the patterns contained in them.

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