

**The portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in historical sources and  
belles-lettres, and the circumstances which played a part in it**

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**Desislava Bozhidarova Todorova**

**aus**

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**Dekan: Prof. Dr. Jürgen Leonhardt**

**Hauptberichterstatterin: Prof. Dr. Monika Schrimpf**

**Mitberichterstatter: Prof. Dr. Klaus Antoni**

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Valentina and Bozhidar Todorovi. Thank you for the myriad of ways in which, throughout my life, you have actively supported me in my determination to find and realise my potential. You were those which have always encouraged me to keep going when I was on the verge of giving up. Your words of motivation and push for tenacity massively contributed to my becoming the person I am now. Thank you for your unwavering love and support along this journey I have taken. I love you both always and forever.

“Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter.”

(Brad Henry)

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## Preliminary Remarks

Firstly, I would like to say a few words about the layout of the current work.

The transcription of Japanese terms follows a lightly modified version of the Hepburn romanization system which could be found in J. C. Hepburn, *A Japanese-English and English-Japanese Dictionary* by J.C. Hepburn (Third Edition, 1886). Chinese names and terms are transcribed according to the Pinyin romanization system.

The Japanese names are given according to the Japanese order: a family name (surname) followed by a given name.

Japanese terms are spelled in small letters. Proper names such as the names of individual persons, places, (religious) organizations, temples, shrines, Buddhist or Shintôist schools of thought, as well as the names of books, newspapers, magazines are spelled with an initial capital letter (valid also for terms and names consisting of two or more words).

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## INTRODUCTION

### General overview

The history of one of the oldest still existing monarchies in the world, the Japanese Imperial House, is a subject of many studies. For an institution as old as the Japanese Chrysanthemum Throne, it is only natural that there are accumulated problems within it such as the lack of male successors to the throne or the exclusion of females from the order of succession, which still await their resolution. In any case, it is namely the study of these issues which helps for the better understanding not only of the structure of the Imperial House but also of the Japanese society as a whole. While it would seem strange to state that the analysis of a certain institution would be helpful for the assessment of the processes taking place in the society as a whole, in the case of Japan, its monarchy and its people, it could be said that the Imperial House reflected the developments in the country and more or less influenced them. Since the establishment of the early Japanese statehood the emperor stood at the apex of the social and political ladder. He represented the state, was symbol of all the features thanks to which the Japanese could describe themselves as such and was considered the unifying figure who ensured the stability of the country. Old aristocratic families such as the Mononobe or the Nakatomi which claimed descent almost as ancient as that of the Imperial line chose to accept the emperor as head of state and to serve him as priests or political advisors. Moreover, since times ancient the figure of the sovereign had also been the source of the social stratification of the Japanese society. Some of the Imperial descendants who didn't want to live a life at court became "commoners" and later set the beginning of the local aristocracy. Such had been the case, for example, with the Soga family which is believed to have been founded by a great-grandson of the mythical Emperor Kôgen (r. 214 B.C. – 158 B.C.)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the Imperial House had become the source of the Japanese society's social grouping. For the better understanding of the meaning of the emperor for the Japanese state one could read the theory of George de Vos, according to which:

"A sense of common origin, of common beliefs and values, and of a common feeling of survival – in brief, a "common cause" – has been important in uniting people into self-defining in-groups. Growing up together in a social unit and sharing a common verbal and gestural language allows humans to develop mutually understood accommodations, which radically diminish situations of possible confrontation and conflict. [...] Humans can, on the basis of group definitions of belonging, develop complex formal systems of individual and group social stratification. These systems are found in many so-called primitive societies as well as in technologically advanced modern states. [...] The cultural bases for social groupings in society are varied. Some groupings such as lineage systems, are defined reciprocally and horizontally. Kinship networks, a major form of grouping, very often operate horizontally as forms of reciprocal marital exchange. Other groupings, such as class and caste, are stratified vertically, with emphasis on the status of an individual or group with respect to other persons or groups."<sup>2</sup>

The existence of the Imperial House is the perfect example of a "*common cause*" which was able to unify the rivaling Japanese tribes into a "*self-defining*" group. Reciprocally, as a sign of respect for the unifying figure, society began to put "*emphasis on the status*" of the emperor until his existence became almost mythical. At the time when the first Japanese histories Kojiki and Nihonshoki were compiled, the descent of the Japanese ruler was already shrouded in mythological mystery and he was

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<sup>1</sup> There are still discussions regarding the descent of the Soga clan. One theory it that the Soga were Iranians who came to Japan from north via Sakhalin. (See Tojo 2009: 7) Another one describes them as immigrants from the Korean Peninsula. (See Buswell Jr., Lopez Jr. 2013: 834)

<sup>2</sup> de Vos/Romanucci-Ross 2006: 1

portrayed as a descendant of the Sun Goddess and thus a living god himself. Even though such depiction of a sovereign seems implausible for the modern Western society which bases its views mainly on science, in Japan the notion was supported by scholars and common people until the end of the World War II. Only after Emperor Hirohito's Humanity Declaration from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1946 with which the emperor denied the concept of him being a living god, an end was put to the portrayal of the Japanese monarch as a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess. Even after that, however, he remained "*the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people.*"<sup>3</sup>

During all those centuries since the establishment of the Imperial House, the role of the women in the institution was mainly confined to her function as Imperial wives or concubines who had to bear the next sovereign in their womb. In the "*unbroken Imperial line*" of 126 emperors, beginning with Jimmu, whose existence has never been proved but, for that matter had been heavily emphasized by both the Imperial House and the Japanese political world, and arriving at the current monarch of Japan Naruhito, one finds only eight women (a ratio of the meager 6%) who had sat on the throne, even though in times ancient there were no regulations which explicitly excluded women from the order of succession. A huge part of these female rulers was concentrated in the Asuka and Nara periods (539 – 710/710 – 794, respectively) during which six women ruled the realm, whereas the other two female emperors could be found much later down the Imperial line, namely in the Edo period (1603 – 1867). Chronologically speaking, the female sovereigns were Suiko (r. 592 – 628), Kôgyoku, who reascended the throne as Emperor Saimei (r. 642 – 645/r. 655 – 661), Jitô (r. 686 – 697), Genmei (r. 707 – 715), Genshō (r. 715 – 724) and Kōken who, like Kôgyoku/Saimei, ascended the throne for a second time and assumed the Imperial name Shōtoku (r. 749 – 758/r. 764 – 770). The last two female rulers were the emperors Meishō (r. 1629 – 1643) und Go-Sakuramachi (r. 1762 – 1771). To be precise, however, they ruled in a period in which the military class was at the apex of the political system and the Imperial House was in decline and could therefore be considered rather figurative than actual heads of state. The same could not be said, however, for the remaining six female emperors whose reigns extended throughout the Asuka and Nara periods. They played an important role for the formation of the political and religious structure of the young Japanese state. During their reigns, many of the Japanese old histories and documents were compiled, a fact which ensured the maintenance of the ethnic identity of the Japanese (according to de Vos's theory).

On that place, one would probably wonder why the word "empress" isn't used in regard to the eight female sovereigns of Japan. In Europe, a female ruler is often called "Empress" or "Queen". However, it would be inaccurate in many aspects if that definition was to be applied to the female emperors of Japan. Firstly, in the island state the term "empress" (皇后, kōgō) has only been used to describe the spouse of the emperor. In modern times, many of the Japanese authors use the term "jotei" (女帝 "female sovereign") when speaking of these female rulers. The term could have emerged from the combination of the characters for "woman" (女; jo) and „emperor“ (帝; tei), as the male emperors of Japan were customarily called „mikado“ (written with the character for "emperor"). According to a study by Takagi Kiyoko, however, the utilization of that term should be seen not as a way to pay respect to the female rulers of Japan, but rather as a way to deny them the honor to which they are due.

"Outside these imperial lineage deliberations, the word jotei has been used with a completely different meaning. Though not as common in recent years, newspapers and weekly magazines used the term jotei to refer to a strong-minded woman, one who featured prominently in public discussion. Whether referring to the wife of a foreign president or a CEO of a large

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<sup>3</sup> The Constitution of Japan 03.11.1946

corporation, jotei was used to negatively describe a woman who leverages the power of her husband's position, goes to great lengths to be heard, and who desires more influence. Why and when the word jotei began to be used in this way is unclear, but the use of the term to disparage women has tarnished the respect due to the actual female emperors of Japan."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the term "tennô" (天皇, Heavenly Sovereign; one could also read it as "sumeramikoto"), which had been used since the compilation of the oldest Japanese histories and had been thus established as the official address to the sovereign, doesn't specify the gender of its holder. The word had its origins in China and began to be used in Japan with the meaning of "emperor" in the 7<sup>th</sup> century during the reigns of the emperors Tenmu and Jitô. Until then, the Japanese rulers were simply called "great chief" or "great king" (大君, ôkimi). Similarly, the posthumous names of all emperors in the Imperial line also don't give any hints about the gender of these sovereigns. According to the history and chronology of the custom of bestowal of a posthumous title (name) on a ruler,

“諡号に二種あり、基一お国風諡と為す [...] 孝謙天皇天平勝宝八載、聖武太上天皇崩じ給ふ、勅して曰く、太上天皇出家仏に歸す、更に諡お奉らずと、又孝謙天皇紀の首にも、宝字称徳孝謙皇帝の生前尊号お標して、出家仏に歸す、更に諡お奉らず、因て宝字二年、百官上る所の尊号お取て之れお称すとあり、国風諡お奉上せざるお雲ふなり、[...] 基二お漢風諡と為す、基制大宝令に始て見えたり、公式令に天皇諡の目ありて、義解に、諡は生時の行跡お累て死後の称と為す、即ち天地お経緯するお文と為し、乱お撥き正に反すお武と為す類お雲ふとあり、是全く漢土の制に効へる故に、今日して漢風諡と雲ふ、”

*[There are two kinds of posthumous names: one based on the national customs and manners [...] However, in the 8th year of Tenpyô-shôho during Emperor Kôken's reign, Retired Emperor Shômu died and an imperial edict was issued, which read that the Retired Emperor was a Buddhist monk, which meant that no traditional posthumous name was given to him. Also, in Emperor Kôken's chapter, there was the honorary title Hôji-shôtoku-kôken-kôtei to be found, which was used during the Emperor's lifetime, the reason for that being, that she was a Buddhist and thus a traditional posthumous name was not given to her. For that reason, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Hôji, it became only appropriate, that an Emperor would be called by his honorary title and no traditional name would be given to him. [...] a Chinese style. Its basis seemed to have begun with the Taihō-ritsuryō, where in the Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter Kushiki-ryō concerning the Imperial names, one could find that one's behavior during one's lifetime was to be reflected in the posthumous name after one's death. In other words, it should be a sentence reflecting one's particular nature, for example, one which showed one's discontent with disorder and one's fondness for righteousness and bravery. The result of that complete turn to the Chinese system was that nowadays those Chinese-style names are regarded as the standard.]<sup>5</sup>*

But, as one can see, that set of traditions doesn't help much for the recognition of the said ruler's gender, either. At best, the posthumous names can describe the sovereigns' characteristics, their

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<sup>4</sup> Takagi 2018: 20

<sup>5</sup> 古事類苑 [Kojiruien]: 帝王部十六 諡号 [Teiō-bu jūroku shigō]

residences or important events which occurred during their reigns. As Takagi Kiyoko rightfully points out,

“Since the titles of these female emperors as Emperor So-and-so (So-and-so tennô) are posthumous and the character for “woman” was not used in historical documents of the time, it is not immediately clear from the characters used to write their names that the female emperors were, in fact, female. Although some of the female emperors from the Nara period, such as Emperor Suiko or Emperor Jitô, may be familiar to Japanese people from the history they learned in school, there are many people who do not know from their names alone that there were two female emperors in the Tokugawa period.”<sup>6</sup>

It is unclear as to when and why precisely the need arose for the Japanese authors and scholars to specify the gender of their rulers. The reason for that interest could have laid in the cultural, political and economic development of the state after the Meiji Restoration. After the warrior class’ rule was abolished and the emperor’s authority restored, the Japanese society turned its eye toward the West. Of course, the main purpose for that interest was rooted in the strong effort of the nation to break free from the shackles of a nearly 300-years-long warrior rule which had put halt to all contacts with the outside world, thus minimizing the chances of economic and societal development. As Klaus and Yvonne Antoni explain in their essay “*Inventing a State Ceremony: Ottmar von Mohl, Jinmu-tennô and the Proclamation of the Meiji Constitution on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1889*”, among all things foreign which were introduced into the Japanese society after the reopening of the country in 1868, it was the political sphere which was most massively influenced by the West.

“European constitutional concepts served as models, and it is well known that foreign advisors (御雇, oyatoi) in the service of the Japanese government played a major role in the drafting of the constitution.”<sup>7</sup>

It was the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1889 with which the peak of those influences was reached. The first Japanese Prime Minister Itô Hirobumi, who headed the Ministry of the Imperial Household (宮内庁, kûnaichô), wanted to organize a ceremony in which Japan was to be presented as a modern country. For that purpose, foreign advisors were hired to assist the Ministry and among them one could find the name of Ottmar von Mohl. During his stay in Japan from 1887 to 1889, von Mohl was entrusted with the task to educate the Imperial master of ceremonies and Itô Hirobumi’s personal secretary about the institutions and rules of conduct at the Prussian court.<sup>8</sup> While helping the Ministry of Imperial Household with the organization of the promulgation ceremony, there were moments when Ottmar von Mohl argued with Itô Hirobumi in regard to the latter’s views on the face which the state supposedly had to show the world. Due to the Prime Minister’ firm conviction to present Japan as a modern country, he didn’t want anything to remind the Westerners of the “old”, that is, traditional Japan.<sup>9</sup> Ironically, despite Hirobumi’s unyielding denial of the notion of traditional

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<sup>6</sup> Takagi 2018: 22

<sup>7</sup> Antoni/Antoni 2017: 2

<sup>8</sup> See Mohl 1904: 9/11

<sup>9</sup> “I may allow myself to remark here that Count Itô’s views, like those of many other of the new Japanese statesmen, were much more radical than our own, that he wanted to do away with some of the old customs, habits and institutions, or had already begun to abolish them, which we could not agree with. Thus, for example, it had unfortunately already been decided and sanctioned before we arrived in Japan that the traditional Japanese costumes for court festivities should be discarded. The explanations we often received in this regard so little correspond to the facts that the very opposite seems closer to the truth. The picturesque female court dress, which to an ancient Japanese imperial court signifies a piece of history and a cherished habit and to the

elements of the Japanese culture to be presented in the promulgation ceremony, he showed ardent interest in the mechanisms of government of the Prussian court.<sup>10</sup> At the end, despite the Prime Minister's protests, the promulgation ceremony turned out to be a mixture of Shintō rituals and Western (European) etiquette, and remained in history as the "*birth of modern Japan.*"<sup>11</sup> As a result, the "guidelines" set by the Meiji politicians encouraged many Japanese to emulate the West in their doing and understanding of things, thus creating a huge shift in the value system and the role models of the nation. In their efforts to copy the developed countries, many Japanese scholars and authors underestimated their own traditions and even found them shameful. The development of mass media such as press or radio made the circulation of pro-Western propaganda even easier to the point that there were voices for the abolishment of central elements of the Japanese culture such as sumō wrestling.<sup>12</sup>

Anyway, while such occurrences took place in the Japanese society as a result of the glittering ceremony for the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution from 1889, the Japanese political world still remained preoccupied with its efforts concerning the adjustment of the Imperial court and its leader the emperor to their role as the (formal) leader(s) of the state. While the role of European advisors such as Ottmar von Mohl or the constitutional lawyers Albert Mosse and Hermann Roessler<sup>13</sup> was to explain the basic structures as well as the modus operandi of the European governmental systems, they probably could not give any advice on matters concerning the female rulers of Japan. The only European country which could give answer to those questions was the British Empire. Coincidentally, at the time of such rapid reconstruction and modernization in Japan, in Europe, a female ruler sat on the British throne. Although the succession in the Empire was managed by the male-preference primogeniture (a mechanism altered not sooner than 2013), meaning that brothers would precede sisters in the line of succession, Queen Victoria ascended the throne as a lone successor after the death of both her grandfather, King George III, and her father, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn. Her long-running rule and the position of the female in a monarchy such as Great Britain could have been an example of the role of the women in the Japanese Imperial House. For despite Meiji Japan's efforts to become a modern and independent country, the reality was that since old times the Japanese society was ruled by strong patriarchal norms which prevented the women from shining in their respective fields, the Imperial position included.

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court ladies confidence in (their) appearance, had already been abandoned by a proclamation of the empress to the women of Japan and replaced with the banal European costume;”, Mohl 1904: 21/22

<sup>10</sup> “The House Minister was not only interested in the organisation of the court, but also in the departmental structure of military and civilian cabinets, the position of the home ministry vis-à-vis the lord steward's office, the audit office, the state ministry; the names, purposes and tasks of the supreme, superior and high royal courts, the organisation of the courts of their majesties and of those of the other members of the royal family; the positions and roles of the court ladies, the maids and servants; the education of the royal princes and princesses and many questions from the area of the royal private family law, as those concerning primogeniture, apanages and equalities. The Japanese court was especially interested in questions of financial law, such as the transfer of property in imperial ownership to the Japanese state, specification of a civil list for the emperor, the income of the empress, the share of the princes and princesses in the family properties [fideicommissum], the possible establishment of a court tax chamber, a court treasury, a casket management [Schatullverwaltung], the control of the court's statements of account by the Japanese audit office after the Prussian model, the level of salaries for court officials and all employees of the court. Quite incomprehensible appeared to them the countless unpaid honorary positions at our courts; that supreme, superior and court officials and chamberlains would serve, as it is mostly the case among us, in honorary offices without remuneration, did not make sense to the Japanese, but they liked this system, as corresponding with their traditional beliefs, very much.”, Mohl 1904: 56/59

<sup>11</sup> Antoni/Antoni 2017: 13

<sup>12</sup> See Kazami 2002: 9. In: Maeda 2007: 6

<sup>13</sup> See Antoni/Antoni 2017: 2

Since the beginning of the Asuka period (538 – 710) when Buddhism was introduced in Japan from China, at first through Korea and then by direct intercourse, a steady stream of continental ideas and values began to weave its way into the Japanese society. In that regard, in his book “Japanese Buddhism” Charles Eliot expresses the view that the Buddhism which reached the Japanese shores came from China almost unchanged. At the same time, however, that fact didn’t mean that the Chinese Buddhism which reached the island state was the same religious teaching which initially was imported into the Middle Kingdom from India.

“Their Buddhism represents a sincere attempt to understand the true doctrine and practice as prevalent in India, but so numerous, intelligent, and artistic a people with ancient ideals and customs of their own were not likely to accept unchanged and without modification a new philosophy and moral system, especially when the country from which the novelties came was distant and not easily accessible.”<sup>14</sup>

It was namely that modified version of Buddhism which reached Japan at some time in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It would probably be useful to briefly explain the modifications which the teaching of Buddha underwent during its introduction and settlement in China. According to Eliot, the vast territory and the huge population of the Middle Kingdom guaranteed cultural and religious independency for its people.<sup>15</sup> Thus, upon its arrival in China, Buddhism had to fight for its existence with other already established doctrines such as Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism, for example, focused on the cultivation of virtue and self-improvement according to Classics such as the Book of Rites, the Book of Odes, the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial, the Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Analects and the Classic of Filial Piety, thus creating a strict code of conduct in a patriarchal society in which a very small role was given to the women. The Book of Rites, for example, taught that a woman had to be virtuous, that is, to follow the males in her family: firstly – her father, then after her marriage – her husband and, eventually, her sons in widowhood. Thus, the women were not considered independent persons but rather appendages of the men.<sup>16</sup> Competing with such a rigid ideology, Buddhism had to find its place under the sun. The teaching of Buddha “...beschäftigte sich [...] viel starker mit dem Individuum und seinen Entfaltungs- bzw. Befreiungsmöglichkeiten ungeachtet gesellschaftlicher Umstände.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast to Confucianism, however, it also taught ideas such as asceticism and celibacy which were hardly accepted and even denied by the Chinese society which considered the continuation of the family as sacred. Moreover,

“It set no store on loyalty and the political virtues which are so dear to the ethics of the Far East, and its monasteries and ecclesiastical organization were dangerously capable of becoming political associations and creating an *imperium in imperio*.”<sup>18</sup>

The prudence of the Buddhist clergy, however, eventually won them the support of the Chinese emperors. Furthermore, by concentrating their efforts on funeral and memorial ceremonies, the monks found a place in the family life of the common people. For all its efforts, however, Buddhism in China could never become the main state religion or, for that matter, doctrine. To a certain degree, it remained bound to Confucianism. As the Chinese emperor Wan-Li cleverly observed, “*Confucianism and Buddhism were like the two wings of a bird: each required the help of the other.*”<sup>19</sup> It can be inferred from that passage that, despite, or probably due to, their differences, the two teachings required the

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<sup>14</sup> Eliot 1959: 142

<sup>15</sup> See Eliot 1959: 142/143

<sup>16</sup> See Li Chi: Book of Rites. In: Ch’u/Winberg/Legge: 439/41

<sup>17</sup> Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 115

<sup>18</sup> Eliot 1959: 146/147

<sup>19</sup> Eliot 1959: 147

existence of the other doctrine for their respective survival, with the main reason for that being that they balanced each another out.

“Buddhism was strong because it offered a better combination of moral, philosophic, and emotional teaching than either of its rivals. [...] it is clear that Confucianism can be considered to be a religion only if we exclude both emotion and speculation from that term.”<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to them, Taoism itself was a doctrine with two sides. Yoshida Kazuhiko describes it as:

“...a fusion of ancient Chinese beliefs in deities, the philosophy of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu (rôshô shisô 老莊思想), concepts of hermit-wizards (shinsen shisô 神仙思想), and various folk beliefs and customs [...] Gradually various rituals, institutions, and teachings developed, religious specialists (male 道士 and female 女冠) appeared, and a Taoist religion with its own world view (道觀) and religious facilities and activities took form.”<sup>21</sup>

Its more esoteric direction brought it close to Buddhism, thus influencing it and bringing new thoughts and philosophies into the traditional Buddhist schools. As Taoism was based on ancient Chinese beliefs, however, it encouraged superstition which made it less popular than the teaching of Buddha. Moreover,

“Gegenüber dem Daoismus, der in dieser Hinsicht zweifellos die schärfste Konkurrenz für den Buddhismus war, hatte der Buddhismus den Vorteil, auf eine lange Institutionalierungsgeschichte in Indien und Zentralasien aufbauen zu können. Es gab einen (wenngleich in der Praxis natürlich fragmentierten) großen, globalen Orden mit klaren Ordensregeln und ein autoritatives Schrifttum. All das begann sich im Daoismus – nicht zuletzt unter buddhistischem Einfluss – erst herauszubilden.”<sup>22</sup>

All things considered, the triad Buddhism – Confucianism – Taoism could not exist without one another. The constant contact between the three ideologies created a new Chinese form of Buddhism which eventually reached Japanese soil in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. That ideology established itself and despite the various changes throughout the centuries, it retained its main characteristics until modern times. In some periods of Japanese history such as the Edo period, for example, its principles were absorbed into the teachings of stronger doctrines such as (Neo-)Confucianism, but it never lost its significance for the formation of the views of the Japanese society.

As it was noted, the teachings of Buddha imported into Japan had absorbed some Taoist and Confucian principles on their way to the archipelago. Among them, there were many scriptures which described the women as sinful creatures which could, and should, not stay on a level equal to that of the men. During turbulent times such as the Edo period in Japan, these restrictions were reassessed and found a new form, thus restricting the social life of the females even further and emphasizing their “role” as an appendage of the men. After the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese lawmakers were busy to run after the Western powers and to emulate their society, political systems and economic prowess, and the example of Queen Victoria as a female ruler in a male-dominated society, albeit important for the future of the Imperial House, was highly unlikely to have played a central role in their thoughts which were concentrated on the situation before their eyes. As a result, the position of the women in the early modern Japanese society remained almost unchanged than that established during the almost

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<sup>20</sup> Eliot 1959: 147

<sup>21</sup> Yoshida (a) 2003: 11

<sup>22</sup> Freiburger/Kleine 2015: 115/116

300-years-long samurai rule. A clear proof of that could be found in the Meiji Constitution promulgated on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1889, in the second article of which one could read that:

“Article 2. The Imperial Throne shall be succeeded to by Imperial male descendants, according to the provisions of the Imperial House Law.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the role of the female members of the Imperial House became clear: they were excluded from the order of succession by law, with a little hope to have that code revoked at some point of time. After the World War II, a new Japanese constitution was promulgated. The expectations of a bigger role for the female, however, were not answered. In Article 2 of the new Constitution, it could be read that:

“Article 2. The Imperial Throne shall be dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House Law passed by the Diet.”<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, the latter narrated that,

“Article 2. The Imperial Throne shall be passed to the members of the Imperial Family according to the following order:

1. The eldest son of the Emperor
2. The eldest son of the Emperor's eldest son
3. Other descendants of the eldest son of the Emperor
4. The second son of the Emperor and his descendants
5. Other descendants of the Emperor
6. Brothers of the Emperor and their descendants
7. Uncles of the Emperor and their descendants

In case there is no member of the Imperial Family as under the numbers of the preceding paragraph, the Throne shall be passed to the member of the Imperial family next nearest in lineage. In the cases of the two preceding paragraphs, precedence shall be given to the senior line, and in the same degree, to the senior member.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the new constitution completely denied the women the right to ascend the Imperial throne of Japan by excluding them from the order of succession.

In light of the said factors, it is no wonder that the female rulers of Japan “enjoyed” much lesser popularity and much bigger scrutiny than any of the male Heavenly Sovereigns of the island state. The critical assessment of the reigns of these female emperors begins with the rule of the first one, Suiko, and reaches its critical apogee with that of the last female ruler of Nara Japan Kôken/Shôtoku. The most “popular” criticism is that a female emperor could not have been a sovereign in her own right, but had been a marionette commanded by the male “puppet masters” at court instead. Apparently such had been the case with Emperor Suiko who had been controlled by the Soga family and Shôtoku Taishi, who functioned as the emperor-in-shadow.<sup>26</sup> On second place could be noted the description

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<sup>23</sup> The Constitution of the Empire of Japan 11.02.1889

<sup>24</sup> The Constitution of Japan 03.11.1946

<sup>25</sup> The Imperial House Law 31.05.1949

<sup>26</sup> See Soper 1967: 198



of the female rulers only as “throneholders”, as they often ascended the throne during periods when there were no suitable male successors, and abdicated when such emerged. Authors such as Ulrich Pauly<sup>27</sup>, for example, describe the rules of the female emperors as “compromise” in times when there had not been any acceptable male candidates for the throne. Therefore, it was presumed that they had not been rightful rulers but rather held ceremonial functions closely connected with Shintô or Buddhism. The female emperor most prominently criticized for that is Emperor Jitô, as she supposedly protected the Imperial throne first for her son Prince Kusakabe and then, after Kusakabe’s death, for her grandson Prince Karu who later became Emperor Monmu. The last female ruler of Nara Japan Kôken/Shôtoku became a target of another accusation. She was given the sanction of a woman with low morality who supposedly had been manipulated by the ambitious monk minister Dôkyô with whom she supposedly had had a sexual relationship. She is therefore portrayed as the female ruler who put the Imperial family and the whole concept of the monarchy in jeopardy, as eventually Dôkyô, supposedly encouraged by Shôtoku’s constant support, attempted to ascend the throne in a what remained in history as the “Dôkyô Incident”.<sup>28</sup>

However, all those depictions could not be accepted as absolute truth if one doesn’t look into the circumstances which influenced the said portrayals. The reasons vary strongly: from political to religious or cultural ones, but, after all, one should not forget that namely female rulers, albeit “incompetent” or “corrupt”, sat on the Japanese throne during turbulent times which often decided the future development of the state. Doubtlessly, the accusation against Kôken/Shôtoku is the most serious as, if it were to be proved right, it would have been the last female emperor of Nara Japan who could be held directly responsible for the exclusion of the women from the order of succession. And while there are many studies based on Japanese chronicles and historical texts (for example, Shoku Nihongi) which describe the life and the two reigns of Kôken/Shôtoku, as well as the unlucky circumstances around her relationship with the monk minister Dôkyô, none of these works addresses the accuracy of the general portrayal of that female ruler or the reasons which moved the authors to create the said image, regardless of whether it had been positive or negative. If one wishes to assess objectively the credibility of those critical claims, such analysis would be crucial, as it could either prove Kôken/Shôtoku’s innocence on the matter or stigmatize her forever as the perpetrator of a crime with massive and hardly repairable consequences for the future generations.

## Methods

### The “interpretational steps”<sup>29</sup> of Johann Gustav Droysen

The first (and main) task which any researcher ought to fulfill when analyzing a historical problem on such a scale is the historical understanding. According to Stefan Jordan,

“Als historisches Verstehen bezeichnet man die Anwendung hermeneutischer Verfahren auf historisches Quellenmaterial. Ziel dieses Verfahrens ist es, geschichtliche Wirklichkeiten im Vergleich mit der Gegenwart deutlich werden zu lassen. Indem der Historiker über ähnliche, aber durch einen zeitlichen Abstand getrennte Denkweisen, Erfahrungen, Gefühle und Verhaltensweisen verfügt, wie die Personen seiner Geschichte, kann er Parallelen und Unterschiede aufzeigen, die ihm als Analogieschluss Ereignisse und Handlungen der Geschichte verständlich erscheinen lassen.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pauly 2007

<sup>28</sup> See Piggott 2003: 65

<sup>29</sup> See Jordan 2018: 49

<sup>30</sup> Jordan 2018: 47

In order for one to be able to successfully fulfill the task of understanding a certain historical event, the modern historiography had developed a strict system of analysis which would help the researcher in his endeavour. According to modern historians, the main contributor to the development of the said system was “*der größte europäische Geschichtstheoretiker des 19. Jahrhunderts*”<sup>31</sup> Johann Gustav Droysen (1808 – 1886). In his lifework “Historik” [“Historicism”] (a series of lectures held between 1857 and 1882/83), Droysen “...proposed that we should not study, research and write history in order to learn or produce universally valid examples. Instead, he suggested that historiography is better conceived of as a vehicle through which authors and readers learn and improve mental skills that he himself addressed as ‘historical thinking’, thus “...elicit[ing] a new approach to the relationship between historical knowledge and human action.”<sup>32</sup> Droysen’s views could definitely be considered innovative. According to Arthur Altfax Assis, “...historicism opposes both theological and mechanistic views on social life: it attempts to understand why the world is the way it is, but not by equating current reality with an order determined by God or resorting to natural patterns or laws. Historicism comprises a special kind of consciousness of time that stresses the singularity of every historical epoch and subject, and is structured by individualizing, developmental and genetic concepts” and could be thus seen as an intellectual phenomenon which “established history as a professional and autonomous discipline.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Droysen’s lectures on historicism divide the methodical research of history into four steps: “*Die Heuristik [...], Die Kritik [...], Die Interpretation [...]* sowie *Die Apodeixis*.”<sup>34</sup> According to Stefan Jordan, the main purpose of the Heuristik (heuristics) is

“...die Entwicklung einer Fragestellung: Indem der Historiker sich überlegt, was er überhaupt untersuchen möchte und was dabei von besonderem Interesse sein könnte (Relevanz), entwickelt er Vorstellungen, welche Quellen ihm für dieses Ziel nutzen können. Die Heuristik umfasst also nicht allein die Formulierung eines Themas, mit dem der Historiker sich beschäftigen möchte und erster Begründungen, warum gerade dieses und kein anderes Thema von besonderem Interesse sei; darüber hinaus gehören auch die Definition und Suche von Arbeitsmaterialien in ihren Gegenstandsbereich.”<sup>35</sup>

Following Droysen’s first “interpretational step”, the question on which the current scientific work would be concentrated should be “*What circumstances had influenced the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in historical sources and belletristic works?*”. For such a question to be answered, one needs first and foremost a stable basis in the form of historical sources. The latter would be most useful in the attempt to assess how the depictions of the last female emperor of Nara Japan changed throughout the ages. For the purpose of the current work, however, a confirmation or denial of the aforementioned criticism in regard to the last female ruler of Nara Japan should and could not be based solely on widely known historical texts such as Shoku Nihongi or Jinnô Shôtoki. For such a task to be successfully brought to an end, one needs to delve deeper into the depths of the Japanese official texts as well as belles lettres. In those texts, more profound depictions and a better understanding of the historical time than in many of the most popular (and translated) texts could be found. Such texts are, unfortunately, often forgotten or omitted, and thus the historical portrayal of political figures remains strongly stereotyped and based only on an incomplete set of sources.

The last sentence could be used as an introduction to the second “interpretational step” of Droysen.

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<sup>31</sup> Rösen 2009: 36

<sup>32</sup> Assis 2014: 2

<sup>33</sup> Assis 2014: 3

<sup>34</sup> Rösen 2009: 33

<sup>35</sup> Jordan 2018: 48

“Im Anschluss an die Heuristik folgt [...] die *Kritik*. Droysen übernimmt dabei die Theorie der Kritik, die schon in der Aufklärungshistorie gebildet worden war, schränkt deren Bedeutung allerdings ein: „Das Ergebnis der Kritik ist nicht ‚die eigentliche historische Tatsache‘, sondern, daß das Material bereit gemacht ist, eine verhältnismäßig sichere und korrekte Auffassung zu ermöglichen“.<sup>36</sup>

That second step could only be fulfilled if one understands the circumstances behind the texts, or, simply said, if one knows how to interpret them right. According to Droysen, the interpretation (die Interpretation) is based on four closely connected points. Those are:

“Er muss (a) in der *pragmatischen Interpretation* Kausalzusammenhänge herstellen, um den “Gang des einst wirklichen Sachverlaufes zu rekonstruieren. Das heißt beispielweise, dass man auf der Grundlage der kritisch gelesenen Quellen zu Schlüssen kommt, welche historischen Ereignisse oder Prozesse andere Ereignisse oder Prozesse bedingt haben. Der Historiker muss (b) eine *Interpretation der Bedingungen* (des Raumes, der Zeit und der Mittel) vornehmen. Damit gemeint ist, dass er zum Beispiel eine Kriegsschlacht unter Berücksichtigung ihrer geographischen Lage, der technischen Möglichkeiten (Kriegsgerät) und ihrer Dauer oder der Jahreszeit, in der sie stattfand, beurteilen muss. Als dritte Aufgabe hat er (c) die *psychologische Interpretation* zu leisten, die beispielweise Handlungen anderer Menschen aus bestimmten Verhaltensweisen oder Charakterzügen heraus zu deuten versucht. [...] Die höchste Form der Interpretation ist für ihn (d) die *Interpretation der Ideen*. In diesem Arbeitsschritt deutet der Historiker das einzelne Ereignis oder eine bestimmte Handlung, die er beschreibt, nicht mehr nur als einzelnes Geschehen oder einzelnen Akt. Hier versucht er vielmehr, das Ereignis oder die Handlung als Ausdruck höherer Zusammenhänge – Droysen nennt diese Zusammenhänge ‚Ideen‘ – zu sehen.“<sup>37</sup>

The scope of the so-called “interpretation of the conditions” could be slightly expanded in regard to the authorship of the written sources. If one delves deeper into the biographies of the authors of historical texts such as Jinnô Shôtoki or Fusô Ryakuki, or of literary prose such as Kojidan or Nihon Ryôiki, it could be seen that in cases in which written sources had not been compiled through the collective effort of many but only through the work of a certain individual, that personality had more often than not been involved in the political or religious world of the respective historical period. For example, the author of Jinnô Shôtoki Kitabatake Chikafusa served as advisor to five emperors and was involved in the internal conflict within the Imperial family which resulted in the period known today as the Nanboku-chô period (Southern and Northern Court period). The authors of Fusô Ryakuki and Nihon Ryôiki were the Buddhist monks Kôen and Kyôkai, respectively. In the case of Kojidan, its author Minamoto no Akikane was not only politically but also religiously involved because he abandoned his initial position at court, shaved his head and eventually compiled his work as a Buddhist monk.

In her preface to the translation of the setsuwa collection Nihon Ryôiki, Kyoko Motomichi Nakamura further elaborates on the matter of the “interpretation of the conditions” by pointing out three points which she describes as essential for Nihon Ryôiki but which could also be applied to each and every text, regardless of whether it is an official history or a literary fiction. Those three points are:

“First, it offers illustrations of religious phenomena whose interpretation is helpful for a better understanding of human experience. Second, the Nihon ryôiki is the earliest collection of Buddhist legends in Japan, and its influence on later literature is significant. Third, it is a key document for

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<sup>36</sup> Jordan 2018: 48

<sup>37</sup> Jordan 2018: 49

understanding how Buddhism was accepted by the Japanese in the first few centuries after its introduction.”<sup>38</sup>

Upon closer examination, that statement could be interpreted as:

- Firstly, a text inevitably reflects the worldview of its author. By extension, he, as a member of a society, represents (to a certain degree) the Weltanschauung of the community;
- Secondly, an early written text is most likely to become a reference point for the compilation of other texts on similar theme in later times, thus extending its influence throughout the ages (intertextuality). Such a tendency is most concerning as, if not handled right, the intertextuality could be expanded to the point of plagiarism<sup>39</sup>, thus rendering the later compiled text ineligible for objective reading and analysis. As a result, the newer text would be seen only as a copy of the older text that reintroduces a common knowledge but does not reflect the views characterizing its respective era.<sup>40</sup>;
- Thirdly, a text invariably reflects, directly or indirectly, the political and religious influences of the era in which it was compiled, even if such had not been the intention of its author.

To sum up, these three conclusions could be systematized into the so-called “human factor”. For its better understanding, one could read Stefan Jordan’s description of the historical scientific world until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to it, it was not until that time period when the historians have begun to actively use original historical sources as references for their scientific works. Before that it was much quicker and easier for an author to use the works of his colleagues without further research.<sup>41</sup> That method of work, however, had one big downside: because of the usage of texts compiled by third persons and not the original historical sources, the possibility of a bias on certain matters was always present. Objectively said, it is impossible for a text to be completely unbiased, as its author is a member of a society with certain understandings, morality and level of cultural development which, unwillingly or not, are always reflected in his writing style. By utilizing an already “biased” text as a reference for one’s work, however, the possibility always exists for the new text to become even more prejudiced toward a certain view. In cases such as that of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku, for example, certain episodes from her life and two reigns were stereotyped to the point that one accepted them as the almost ultimate opinion on the matter, thus leaving a little room for further discussion. Under such circumstances, it becomes extremely difficult for one to try to express a view different from the one already accepted as absolute due to the lack of sources saying otherwise. However, that difficulty could also be overturned to one’s advantage. If one had already accepted that a text could never be completely objective, then one could focus one’s efforts on finding subtle nuances such as phrases or words which could potentially help one to better understand the circumstances which influenced the author in the compilation of his text.

Interestingly enough, the same conclusions in regard to the “interpretation of the conditions”, or for that matter the “human factor”, are also acknowledged by Daniel Schley in his book *“Herrschersakralität im mittelalterlichen Japan”* where he criticizes the lack of objective analysis of historical figures in Japanese chronicles, especially when it comes to members of the Imperial family:

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<sup>38</sup> Nihon ryōiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: Translator’s Preface

<sup>39</sup> See Genette 1997: 18

<sup>40</sup> On that point, in his “Archaeology of Scientific Reason”, Michel Foucault points out that “a given epoch’s conception of knowledge is ultimately grounded in its “experience of order” - that is, the fundamental way in which it sees things connected to one another.”, See Gutting 1989: 139

<sup>41</sup> See Jordan 2018: 46

“Anstatt also den japanischen Herrschern pauschal eine sakrale Würde zuzusprechen, muss die Frage sehr viel präziser darauf gerichtet werden, für welche Zeiträumen sie gültig war, in welcher Intensität sie nachzuweisen ist und wie sie sich im zeitlichen Verlauf veränderte. Ein Blick auf genannte Sammelbände oder die umfangreichen Studien von Nelly Naumann, Joan Piggott und Hermann Ooms zeigt, dass dies besonders für das japanische Altertum geleistet wurde. Für die Jahrhunderte bis zur Moderne gibt es zwar vereinzelte Beiträge, auf die noch genauer einzugehen sein wird, doch steht eine gründliche Prüfung der Anwendbarkeit von Theorien zur Sakralherrschaft des Mittelalters in Japan nachgeholt werden. Im Zentrum werden dabei die Vorstellungen und Wahrnehmungen der mittelalterlichen Menschen stehen, weil sie es letztlich sind, die ihre Herrscher in sakrale Höhen entrückten oder wieder in allzu irdische Niederungen herabzogen.“<sup>42</sup>

That statement can be understood in much the same way as the so-called “interpretation of the conditions”: that a view on a certain matter could not be simply accepted as “absolute” or “universal” without knowing (and analysing) the circumstances which led to its formation. These factors could be strongly influenced by historical knowledge and/or myths, by the epoch, or by the cultural development of the community. As a result, it is absolutely possible that the views of a certain group of people could not be accepted in a different era or by different people, since the latter do not share the same cultural, political or ideological knowledge as the society initially responsible for the formation of the said opinion.

All in all, if one wishes to objectively assess whether Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku had really been a naïve and easily influenced woman or a powerful ruler who could be compared to her male counterparts, and thus be able to achieve the last step in Droysen’s methodology, the *Apodeixis*<sup>43</sup>, one needs to work with a vast database of texts compiled not only during her lifetime but also in much later periods of Japanese history. From a certain point of view, those later texts could be considered more important than the contemporary texts because they could, and most certainly will, show how (and why) the depiction of a historical figure has changed in the course of time. However, the task of finding not so well-known texts compiled in different historical times is undeniably more difficult than the task of analyzing already known contemporary texts. Upon close research, one comes to the conclusion that in regard to the writing of texts some periods of Japanese history had been very abundant, while other periods had been very frugal. Such abundant eras were, for example, the Nara and Heian periods which were also defined by a relative political and religious stability, whereas the comparatively politically unstable Muromachi period could be described as extremely frugal. The same could be said about the Edo period, an epoch marked by political and religious stability, but also a time in which the weakening of the Imperial family, which had begun in the Heian period (794 – 1185) with the rise to power of the Fujiwara family, reached its peak with the establishment of Tokugawa’s military government and their hold on power for nearly 300 years (1600 – 1868). At that time, the Imperial House of Japan and respectively the emperor functioned merely as figureheads of state, as the whole power was concentrated in the hands of the Tokugawa bakufu. After the Meiji Restoration from 1868 and the return of political authority to the sovereign, Japan became more economically- than culturally-oriented, which explains the small number of texts compiled during that period. The Shōwa period (1926 – 1989), on the other hand, was a period marked by the Japanese reverse toward the ideologies of totalitarianism, ultranationalism and fascism and the country’s eventual participation in the World War II on the side of the Axis. Many books were written then in which the concept of the emperor as

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<sup>42</sup> Schley 2014: 17

<sup>43</sup> „A logical term, applied to judgments which are necessarily true, as of mathematical conclusions.“, Chisholm 1910-1911: 183

“the father of the nation and demigod” was rediscovered and developed even further.<sup>44</sup> Although those radical ideas were eventually crushed with Japan’s defeat and Emperor Hirohito’s Humanity Declaration (01. 01. 1946) in which the sovereign himself denied the concept of him as a living god, from the point of view of the Shōwa period authors, it was probably considered natural to compile as many books in regard to the Imperial line and the emperor himself as possible.

As a result of such inconsistent density of the historical and belletristic sources and, by extension, depiction of the Imperial family and its members<sup>45</sup>, it becomes extremely difficult for one to find enough historical and literary sources for an objective analysis. Therefore, one must pay attention to all the subtle nuances in the available texts, of single words or phrases which could bring forth not only the spirit of the epoch but also the depiction of historical figures. For the successful accomplishment of such a task, one needs to carefully choose the methods with which the said problem could be best solved.

### Source criticism

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the first and main scientific method which would be best put to use in that work would be the criticism and interpretation of written sources, both historical and belletristic. Before that, it would be useful to briefly explain the origins of the said scientific method. According to Martina Lohe, the roots of the source criticism could be traced back to the Renaissance.

“Die moderne historische Quellenkritik entwickelte sich aus ihren Vorläufern, der Philologischen Textkritik, welche aus der Renaissance stammt und vor allem an literarischen Quellen, wie der Bibel, angewandt wurde...”<sup>46</sup>

Then, according to the subjects to be analyzed, one can distinguish two different types of source criticism: outer and inner source criticism. The former concerns itself with the *“Echtheit und Vollständigkeit der Quelle, klärt Indizien für inhaltliche Fälschungen, falsche Autorangaben und Überlieferungsvarianten ab und erhellt den Entstehungskontext der Quelle und deren Überlieferungsgeschichte.”*<sup>47</sup> The latter assesses the contents and the meaning of the respective source. It also addresses the place and time of the source’s compilation, the author’s intention and his general idea, the historical context, as well as any potential unclear passages or words in the text.<sup>48</sup> An important part of the source criticism is the final assessment:

“...welchen Erkenntniswert und welche Aussagekraft die Quelle in Bezug auf die Fragestellung besitzt. Somit ist das Ziel einer Quellenkritik nicht, die Quelle in all ihren Einzelheiten zu analysieren, sondern sie unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Fragestellung auf Antworten zu untersuchen. Somit ist es auch mithilfe von Quellen nicht möglich zu zeigen, „wie es denn gewesen ist“. Vielmehr kann aufgrund der subjektiven Interpretation durch den Historiker nur eine mögliche Interpretation der Vergangenheit formuliert werden.”<sup>49</sup>

From that point of view, the source criticism would play a central role in the process of analyzing the old Japanese texts as well as the intention of their authors, as it allows a free interpretation of a

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<sup>44</sup> For example, Kokutai no hongei (国体の本義, “Cardinal Principles of the National Body/Structure”) (1937) and Shinmin no michi (臣民の道, “Way of Subjects”) (1941).

<sup>45</sup> See Schley 2014: 17

<sup>46</sup> Lohe 2018: 1

<sup>47</sup> Lengwiler 2011: 98

<sup>48</sup> See Geschichtstutorium der Universität Tübingen 2009

<sup>49</sup> See Geschichtstutorium der Universität Tübingen 2009

source's contents and enables the expression of one's own view on a certain matter. Thus, by utilizing the said method, it would be possible to make hypotheses of the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, be it positive or negative, as well as the reasons hidden behind the said narrative.

## Discourse analysis

### Barbara Johnstone and her "Discourse Analysis"

Another method which would prove helpful for the achievement of the purpose of the current scientific work would be the discourse analysis. In her book *"Discourse Analysis"*, Barbara Johnstone describes an experiment given to eleven people who all had to think about themes to analyse by applying the said scientific method. Eventually, the subjects of each respective work varied from poems up to newspaper coverage of a prison scandal in England or political debates, and seemingly did not have anything in common except for their analysis of language, its usage and its effect on people. That made the author ask the question *"Is discourse analysis, then, simply the study of language and its effects?"*, and to answer herself:

"It has been described that way. It has been suggested, for example, that "the name for the filed 'discourse analysis'...says nothing more or other than the term 'linguistics': the study of language". In a way, this is exactly correct: discourse analysis is the study of language, in the everyday sense in which most people use the ter. What most people mean when they say "language" is talk, communication, discourse. (In formal language study, both descriptive and prescriptive, the term "language" is often used differently, to refer to structures or rules that are thought to underlie talk.) Even if discourse analysis is, basically, "the study of language", however, it is useful to try to specify what makes discourse analysis different from other approaches to language study."<sup>50</sup>

From the said description, it becomes clear that a discourse analysis is the study of language with all its nuances. Barbara Johnstone goes further in her search of the true meaning behind the term and tries to give an explanation of the two words separately.

"To discourse analysts, "discourse" usually means actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language, although some define the term more broadly as "meaningful symbolic behavior" in any mode. "Discourse" in this sense is usually a mass noun. Discourse analysts typically speak of *discourse* rather than *discourses*, the way we speak of other things for which we often use mass nouns, such as *music* ("some music" or "three pieces of music" rather than "three musics") or *information* ("the flow of information", "a great deal of information", rather than "thousands of informations"). Communication can, of course, involve other media besides language. Media such as photography, clothing, music, architecture, and dance can be meaningful, too, and discourse analysts often need to think about the connections between language and other such modes of semiosis, or meaning-making.

Not all linguistic communication is spoken or written: there are manual languages, such as American Sign Language, whose speakers use gesture rather than sound or graphic signs."<sup>51</sup>

Johnstone further explains that the "discourse" in the term "discourse analysis" is deliberately chosen before other options such as "language analysis", for example, to underscore the fact that concentrating on *"language as an abstract system"*<sup>52</sup> is not something encompassed by the said

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<sup>50</sup> Johnstone 2018: 1/2

<sup>51</sup> Johnstone 2018: 2

<sup>52</sup> See Johnstone 2018: 2

scientific method. By using discourse analysis, one draws on one's knowledge about language based on one's everyday interactions, on things one hears, reads or writes, and concentrates on how one uses that information to express feelings, to convey thoughts and intentions, to entertain oneself and the others, and even to create art. As Barbara Johnstone sums it up,

“Discourse is both the source of this knowledge (people's generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse they participate in) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse).”<sup>53</sup>

Philosophically speaking, one could say that discourse (or, discourses) are way(s) of communication which influence and/or are influenced by ideas.<sup>54</sup> As one can see, discourse can not simply be understood as “talking”, that is, as a way of saying something to someone, but rather as a whole set of knowledge hidden behind a seemingly simple word such as “language”. For example, the purposes and intentions with which one uses language, or for that matter any other means of communication, to convey something to the others are main parts of that system.

While that explanation makes the word “discourse” rather abstract and somewhat difficult to understand, that is seemingly not the case with the second word comprising the term “discourse analysis”. As Barbara Johnstone rightfully points out,

“Perhaps the most familiar use of the word “analysis” is for processes, mental or mechanical, for taking things apart. Chemical analysis, for example, involves using a variety of mechanical techniques for separating compounds into their elemental parts. Mental analysis is also involved, as the chemist thinks in advance about what the compound's parts are likely to be. Linguistic analysis is also sometimes a process of taking apart.”<sup>55</sup>

Not much different seems to be the case with linguistics and its researchers. They also strive to divide a conversation, a discourse, in parts in order to better understand and analyse it.

“Discourse analysts often find it useful to divide longer stretches of discourse into parts according to various criteria and then at the particular characteristics of each part. Divisions can be made according to who is talking, for example, where the paragraph boundaries are, when a new topic arises, or where the subject ends and the predicate begins. [...] Discourse can be taken apart into individual words and phrases, and concordances of these – sets of statistics about where a particular word is likely to occur, how frequent it is, what words tend to be close to it – can be used to support claims about how grammar works or what words are used to mean.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, it could be summarized that “discourse analysis” is the splitting of a conversation in “portions” as a means to better understand and analyse it. What is meant here is not simply to understand the meaning behind one or another word or phrase, but rather the perception of the system according to which a conversation takes place – how words are used to convey an idea, why a certain word is chosen instead of another, and how those words complement each other to form a homogeneous flow of communication.

As it already became clear, the data with which a discourse analysis works is always a (part of) discourse. Depending on the ultimate goal and the subject of the scientific work, that discourse could be in the

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<sup>53</sup> Johnstone 2018: 2

<sup>54</sup> See Johnstone 2018: 2

<sup>55</sup> Johnstone 2018: 3

<sup>56</sup> Johnstone 2018: 3



form of an interview, an essay, a book, a dialogue, even a song. Among those types of communication, the written ones are always the easiest to work with because they always have a beginning and an end. For example, in the case of a book, it always has a front and a back cover and all information is contained between these two points of reference. Moreover, the book is the one medium which is at least likely to change: due to it being a physical object, its contents could not easily be altered except if one tears some pages from it. However, not all discourse analysts have the luck to work with written mediums. As Barbara Johnstone points out,

“But many discourse analysts work with instances of discourse that do not have all – or any – of these characteristics. For one thing, many written texts, such as webpages, blogs, and wikis, are more fluid than printed discourse once was, co-created by many people, changing from minute to minute, and appearing differently on different computer screens. Furthermore, a great deal of discourse analysis is about non-written discourse. Since we cannot analyze discourse in these modes in real time, as it is taking place – analysis requires much more time and distance than a single viewing or listening provides – we study *records* of discourse. For online written discourse, these records may be in the form of chat logs or screenshots. For oral discourse, they are often in the form of transcripts of audio- or video-recordings. By capturing changing written texts at a particular time or recording and transcribing non-written discourse, we give them some of the characteristics of books and other more prototypical texts: we make them into physical objects; we fix their structure; we convert them into writing, in the case of oral discourse; we give them boundaries.”<sup>57</sup>

As it could be seen, the book, or any other written medium, is often used as a reference point, as a model to which all other discourse forms should be compared and accordingly adapted. However, one could not work with a single piece of discourse. Therefore, the discourse analysts initially begin with a small amount of data which they use to make qualitative claims. That is to say, they do not make claims about how often something takes place in an interaction in general but why and how it occurs in the data at their disposal. They also make suggestions whether the conclusions reached by them by using this small amount of data would apply to bigger amounts of it. On that first step, all conclusions or claims remain in the sphere of the speculation, or suggestion. The purpose of the next step is to prove the said conclusions or claims true or false by using bigger amounts of data. The ultimate result of the discourse analysis would always vary depending on the intention of the one using the said scientific method. What doesn't change, however, is the fact that,

“...all discourse analysis results in description: describing texts and how they work is always a goal along the way. In some discourse analysts' work, descriptions of texts are used in answering questions that arise in the service of “descriptive” or “documentary” research, particularly in linguistics. Work of this kind is based in the idea that the primary goal of scholarly research is to describe the world, or whatever bit of the world the researcher is interested in. [...] To aim to do purely descriptive work presupposes two beliefs: (1) that it is possible to describe the world – in other words, that there is not an infinite number of possible descriptions, any one of which would be valid in some situation, and (2) that the proper role of a scholar is to describe the status quo first, and only later, if at all, to apply scholarly findings in the solution of practical problems.”<sup>58</sup>

Those two beliefs, however, are more often than not a subject of criticism from other ideologies or theories such as the philosophical relativism or Marxism. Relativism, for example, is the idea that

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<sup>57</sup> Johnstone 2018: 17

<sup>58</sup> Johnstone 2018: 24

different people live in different worlds, that is, they have different minds, different norms and beliefs or different languages. That theory puts the first belief regarding the discourse analysis into question. If the belief that the world is in a relative status quo is not valid, then the findings made through discourse analysis would also be untrue, or at least inaccurate. Those new theories and the conclusions made by them show the need for further development of the discourse analysis. According to Jonhstone, nowadays the said scientific method is most often used as a means for criticism of the *“possibility of producing a single, coherent, scientifically valid description”*<sup>59</sup>. Thus, by using the discourse analysis one should always be conscious of one’s purpose as well as of the situation which one wishes to study.

As it could be seen, the discourse analysis is, in a sense, a very simple and at the same time extremely difficult method for one to use. Its work with mediums such as books, newspapers, or even songs, makes it somewhat comparable to the case study<sup>60</sup> which also uses written sources as the main basis for its claims. At the same time, it also utilizes some methods from the “interpretational steps” of Droysen such as the “interpretation of conditions” which strongly depends on factors such as time, space and opportunity to make its claims. On the other hand, despite its similarities to other scientific methods, the discourse analysis is much different from them, with the most distinctive difference being its dependency on the belief that the world is in a status quo, meaning that there are only limited possibilities to be found in any situation. The attempts of discourse analysts to adapt each and every type of communication to a medium similar to a book could also be attributed to that same belief. While that trust into the world’s consistency gives a sense of integrity to one’s own work, it could also compromise the end results since the world is after all an ever-changing entity. The same thing could be said about the discourses and their main “tool” the language. As Barbara Johnstone rightfully points out,

“When we start to look at actual extended instances of talk rather than analyzing hypothetical sentences or isolated phrases elicited from field informants, we begin to notice that neither linguists’ “descriptive” grammars nor the pedagogical grammars used in teaching language account for all of what people actually do as they interact through talk, sign, or writing. Sentence structures which, according to such grammars, are incomplete, incorrect, or even impossible are, in fact, routine in some situations. People use words that are not in the dictionary, and others understand them. most grammars have nothing to say about the ways in which gesture and gaze and paralinguistic cues such as intonation contribute to meaning-making.

Furthermore, thinking systematically about the processes by which texts are built and interpreted in actual interactions causes us to notice that the relationship between “language” and “discourse” is not convincingly described in the conventional vocabulary of language pedagogy or linguistics, either. People do not actually appear to do what they do by “using” a body of “language” or “knowledge of language” or “linguistic competence” that they already possess. Language seems, instead, to be created by speakers as they interact, noticing, repeating, and sometimes making reflective generalizations about what other people do, in the process of evoking and creating a world.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jonstone 2018: 25

<sup>60</sup> For more information see “Case Study Method: Key Issues, Key Texts” by Roger Gomm, Martyn Hammersley and Peter Foster.

<sup>61</sup> Johnstone 2018: 29

That description fully supports the opinion expressed before that the world, as well as the language, is an ever-changing entity which could not be molded according to one's own expectations of the things. The language is probably the most flexible thing in the world, as it changes almost every day in a way which would ensure a healthy communication between its users. Thus, one should, and could, not see the discourse as a method which works with "dead" objects (for example, books) bound together by their common usage of written speech. While it is true that the written sources of discourse contain a language sealed between their pages which is thus unsusceptible to change or "modernization", it should be admitted that this "frozen tongue" is like a mirror of bygone days and situations and could be perceived as interesting and new from the modern reader's point of view as any other form of communication. Therefore, it could be said that the "language", as a tool for the discourse, gives the impression of an always changing and self-developing "living" thing. From that point of view, it should also be noted that it is always the users of that tool, the speakers, who are responsible for its change and development. It is also the people who decide the future of one or another word, or one or another phrase, and eventually, of one or another language depending on their needs and preferences at a certain moment.

### Michel Foucault and his views on knowledge, discourse and language

As it was seen, in her book of the same name Barbara Johnstone focuses mainly on the meaning of grammar for the language: the main vessel and tool of communication, or discourse. Michel Foucault, on the other hand, adopts a much wider approach, as he observes the discourse not only as a grammatical entity but also as a link to and bridge between knowledge and other "*nondiscursive domains such as "institutions, political events, economic practices and processes"*"<sup>62</sup>. In regard to the understanding and development of knowledge, in his "The Order of Things" from 1966, Foucault expresses the view that the meaning of a word has never been static, but has rather varied from one historical period to another. He distinguishes three main phases (periods): the Renaissance (16<sup>th</sup> century), the Classical Age (mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and the Modern Age (the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to at least the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Moreover, he notes that "*a given epoch's conception of knowledge is ultimately grounded in its "experience of order" - that is, the fundamental way in which it sees things connected to one another.*"<sup>63</sup> Thus, according to him, Renaissance could be described as the time during which the things were seen through their resemblance to one another. In contrast, the Classical Age welcomed relations of identity and difference. In the Modern Age, the basic realities are "*organic structures*" connected to one another by analogies between their structures and hence their functions.<sup>64</sup> As a third characteristic of the understanding of knowledge, Foucault notes that "*since knowledge is always a matter of somehow formulating truths about things, its nature in a given period will depend on the period's construal of the nature of the signs used to formulate truths.*"<sup>65</sup> Last but not least, the author sees the link between the knowledge and discourse: "*since the signs most important for formulating knowledge claims are linguistic ones, the nature of knowledge depends on an epoch's conception of language.*"<sup>66</sup>

In regard to the abovementioned conception of language, Foucault concerns himself with the so-called "*general grammar*" – a concept typical of the Classical Age. He emphasizes that the said term is not an effort to find grammatical similarities between the different languages, but rather:

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<sup>62</sup> Gutting 1989: 256

<sup>63</sup> Gutting 1989: 139

<sup>64</sup> See Gutting 1989: 140, 146, 181

<sup>65</sup> Gutting 1989: 139/140

<sup>66</sup> Gutting 1989: 140

“The "generality" of these grammars consists in the fact that they explicate the fundamental system of representation that underlies all the grammatical rules of a given language. A general grammar aims at establishing "the taxonomy of each language," the "system. of identities and differences" that defines its particular mode of representation and provides "the basis, in each of them, for the possibility of discourse". Specifically, any general grammar can be understood in terms of the four key features of a language's representative function: attribution, articulation, designation, and derivation.”<sup>67</sup>

The *attribution* is the connection of two mental representations which is achieved in a proposition by the verb's affirmation of the coexistence of the two representations. Then, the *articulation* is the process in which different words express different representational contents.<sup>68</sup> According to Foucault's analysis, the *designation* could be found in the initial association of the exclamations emitted by people in certain situations. Despite their lack of meaning, they express our “*animalistic side*” and could thus be seen as connection between different people and their intentions.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, the languages have greatly developed from their primitive forms leading to a change not only in the forms of the words but also in their respective meaning. The process in which meanings of the language have developed, with increasing subtlety and complexity, could be described as *derivation*. The development of writing systems is closely connected to the process of derivation.<sup>70</sup>

Anyway, the development of society and the fragmentation of knowledge (per Foucault) in the Modern Age made language lose its central position which it had held in the Classical Age. As he explains,

“The structure of language is no longer that of knowledge as such (i.e., an ordering of representations); nor is all scientific knowing just a refinement of the knowledge implicit in ordinary language. Language is now itself just "one object of knowledge among others".”<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, the author maintains the view that despite those changes in the perception of language and its connection to knowledge, the former still remained “*the medium through which any knowledge must be expressed.*”<sup>72</sup> Burdened with the history behind its development, however, the language weighs its users down with meanings and presumptions which eventually lead to confusion and distortion of what one tries to express. Here, Foucault discusses two projects by the modern thought which are meant to gain control over the language: the first is “*an effort of purification via formalization, designed to purge alien, distorting linguistic elements.*”<sup>73</sup>, while the second is “*the critical interpretation of language.*”<sup>74</sup>, the purpose of which is to understand the meanings suggested in it. According to Foucault, these two methods, albeit seemingly opposed, are connected to each other.

“Interpretation seeks to understand language as a historical reality; but, as we learn from philology, this reality is, in its essence, a formal structure. Correspondingly, the project of formalization must begin with some implicit understanding of the meaning of the linguistic forms with which it deals.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Gutting 1989: 157

<sup>68</sup> See Gutting 1989: 158

<sup>69</sup> See Gutting 1989: 159

<sup>70</sup> See Gutting 1989: 160

<sup>71</sup> Gutting 1989: 195

<sup>72</sup> Gutting 1989: 195

<sup>73</sup> Gutting 1989: 196

<sup>74</sup> Gutting 1989: 196

<sup>75</sup> Gutting 1989: 196

Eventually, all these thoughts and ideas are reflected in the literature: *“the peculiarly modern phenomenon of writing that presents the realm of language as an entirely autonomous domain.”*<sup>76</sup> According to that understanding of literature, the main purpose of the language is to exist for its sake and to speak in its own right: not as a tool to express alien thoughts, but as a vessel carrying its own meaning. Thus, questions about language become central and could be summed up in the query: *“What is language [and] how can we find a way round it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plentitude?”*<sup>77</sup>

Anyway, the answer to that question can probably be found in an earlier work of Michel Foucault: *“The birth of the clinic”* (1963). There, the author expresses the thought that *“our age is, no doubt, one of criticism, but not [...] criticism (critique) that can start from the fact of knowledge.”*<sup>78</sup> Instead, a critique can start only from the *“fact that language exists”*, with no assumptions about its truth or validity.<sup>79</sup> As he points out,

“We cannot expect to find large truths about our nature and destiny in the wisdom of what has been said or to evaluate this wisdom on the basis of our own uncovering of such truths. We can only try to understand “the innumerable words spoken by men” through which “a meaning has taken shape that hangs over us.” There is no hope of breaking through this web of language to a world of fundamental truths. “We are doomed historically to history, to the patient construction of discourses about discourses, and to the task of hearing what has already been said” (xvi).<sup>80</sup>

From Foucault’s point of view, however, one needs not lose hope in one’s attempts to find the truth. One must simply adopt an approach different from the traditional one:

“...our discourse about discourses need not take the form it almost always has in the modern world: that of *commentary*. Commentary is an effort to “uncover the deeper meaning of speech.” It is based on the assumption that there is, in what has been said, something not explicitly expressed that is nonetheless implicitly present as the fundamental meaning intended by those who have spoken. In short, “commentary” is the technique employed by modern efforts at the hermeneutic understanding of texts.<sup>81</sup>

Instead, he proposes the so-called structural analysis of discourses: *“...meaning would be a function of the statement’s role in a system of statements, determined by “the difference that articulates [the statement] upon the other real or possible statements.”*<sup>82</sup> The methods used for that type of analysis Foucault describes as either “aesthetic” or “psychological”. The former works with analogies between the views of different thinkers in which history operates entirely on the level of the intentional content of what has been said.<sup>83</sup> The latter operates at the same level but tries to reverse the meanings of the texts through a “psychoanalysis” of thought which would show how a certain person was not as rational or irrational as a surface reading indicates.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Gutting 1989: 196

<sup>77</sup> Gutting 1989: 197/198

<sup>78</sup> Gutting 1989: 133

<sup>79</sup> See Gutting 1989: 133

<sup>80</sup> Gutting 1989: 133/134

<sup>81</sup> Gutting 1989: 134

<sup>82</sup> Gutting 1989: 134

<sup>83</sup> See Gutting 1989: 134

<sup>84</sup> See Gutting 1989: 134/134

## Kôken/Shôtoku's discourses: strategies to analyze the language from and about her

As it was sketched, Barbara Johnstone and Michel Foucault present two different meanings hidden behind the term “discourse analysis”. While Johnstone concerns herself only with the linguistic side of the language and, by extension, the discourse, Foucault offers a more philosophical perspective: he sees the language and, by extension, the discourse as an independent entity, the meaning of which, despite one's efforts, strategies and approaches, could never be fully grasped. Therefore, one can simply accept the “*fact that language exists*” and only try to assess its meaning and function based on variables such as the historical period during which a certain discourse takes place. As a result of the different approaches of Johnstone and Foucault, the analysis of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal by the means of the discourse analysis would also take two different paths.

Firstly, following the view of Barbara Johnstone that the discourse analysis is a method to analyze certain forms of speech, their frequency of usage as well as their “linguistic” development and evolution, it would be most interesting to assess the construction of the Imperial edicts of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. During Emperor Shôtoku's second reign, the justification of her rule became a cornerstone in her political strategy. Among all other means to do that, she utilized the usage of omens and oracles, thus creating the impression that both the native and the Buddhist deities supported and protected her from her enemies. That tendency is reflected in her Imperial edicts (senmyô, shô and choku). For the relatively short reign of six years, the huge number of twenty-one omens were reported in Emperor Shôtoku's edicts. In comparison, during her first reign as Emperor Kôken from 749 to 758 (a period of nine years), there were only six cases of auspicious portents to be reported in Shoku Nihongi. At the same time, there were absolutely no omens reported from the reign of Emperor Junnin (r. 758 – 764) who, similar to his successor on the throne Shôtoku, also ruled for a period of six years. From that point of view, a discourse analysis of the language used in the said edicts as well as the reason why one word or phrase was preferred before another would be most useful for the better understanding of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's views on her own portrayal and what impression of herself she wanted to leave for the future generations.

Then, following some of Michel Foucault's views on discourse analysis, it would be a challenge to try to reverse the meanings of the Imperial edicts through a “psychoanalysis” of thought<sup>85</sup> which would show whether Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku had been a weak and indecisive woman or rather a cunning and shrewd ruler. At the same time, expanding Foucault's theory that the meaning of the word has never been static, but has rather varied from one historical period to another<sup>86</sup>, it would be most interesting to analyze how the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan changed throughout the ages. Objectively speaking, it wouldn't be strange if one expects to find the most unbiased image of Kôken/Shôtoku in her contemporary chronicle Shoku Nihongi. By extension, one could also conclude that all other sources after that follow (partly copy) the views expressed by Fujiwara no Tsugutada and Sugano no Mamichi. Unfortunately, however, that seems to not have been the case, as later sources and literature show a very drastic portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, especially in regard to her relationship with the Buddhist monk Dôkyô. Therefore, it would be most interesting to observe at what point in time the image of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku began to deviate from the objectivity, and also try to analyze the reasons hiding behind the said deviation.

## State of the art

After having presented the general problematic issues in regard to the position of the female in the Imperial House and the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, as well as the methods which would be

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<sup>85</sup> See Gutting 1989: 134/134

<sup>86</sup> See Gutting 1989: 139

best suited for the purpose of the current work, it would be useful to present the state of the art on the matter. Before that, however, a brief introduction of the historical, cultural and political context of the theme would also be needed, as it would doubtlessly contribute to the better understanding of the discussed issue.

It is well known that Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku had been the last female ruler of Nara Japan who ruled the country not once but twice, thus remaining in history as one of the few Japanese sovereigns having done so. The historical period Nara in itself was the era in which not only many cultural, political and societal ideas from the continent found their way into the island state but also the country's political and cultural foundation was firmly established. It was during the Nara period when the outer influences from the continent were finally assimilated into the indigenous culture and politics, thus creating the stable basis for the future generations. Here, it should be noted that the earliest official Japanese history is divided into three main epochs: Jōmon, Yayoi and Kōfun. Interestingly enough, despite its developed technology and methods, the archaeology is still uncertain in regard to their precise periodization. It is generally accepted that the Jōmon period covered the time from c. 14 000 – 300 B.C.<sup>87</sup>, the Yayoi period extended from 300 B.C. until 300 A.D.<sup>88</sup>, and the Kōfun period covered the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century until the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, new findings suggest that humans lived on the archipelago even earlier than the 14 000 B.C.<sup>90</sup>, while there are still fiery debates regarding the periodization of the Yayoi period.<sup>91</sup> To make things even more complicated, the scientific difficulties are often accompanied by the discussions regarding the beginning of the Imperial House of Japan.

The mytho-history of the island state postulates that the first Japanese emperor had apparently been Emperor Jinmu, who was dispatched to the islands by his grandmother the Sun Goddess Amaterasu in order to act as “...sort of intermediary between deities (within the so-called “the cult of the sun”) and the later Japanese emperors, thus legitimizing their power over the country.”<sup>92</sup> According to the mytho-chronicles Kojiki and Nihonshoki, after having subdued all opposition, Kami-yamato Ihare-biko, as is his official name, established his residence in the Kashihara plain in the year tsuchi-no-to-hitsuji (662 B.C.), thus officially setting the beginning of the Japanese Imperial House.<sup>93</sup> Romanticized that beginning of the Japanese state may be, but there are unfortunately no historical evidences which could support it. The only texts which preserved these glorious days had been Kojiki and Nihonshoki: both rather mytho-histories than official historical texts. Moreover, Klaus Antoni's thorough study on the matter explains that at the time of their compilation (712 and 720, respectively) there were many other factors involved than simply the striving for accurate historical narrative.<sup>94</sup> From that point of view, one could not simply accept that the first Japanese emperor had been a semi-god called Kami-yamato Ihare-biko, or simply Emperor Jinmu. As it would be discussed later in the work, however, the theme of Emperor Jinmu and his supposed establishment of the Japanese state and the Imperial House proved to have been very useful for the creation of the so-called “political myth”<sup>95</sup>. It had apparently

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<sup>87</sup> See Perri 2016: 1166/67

<sup>88</sup> See Mizoguchi (b) 2013: 22

<sup>89</sup> See Keally (c) 2009

<sup>90</sup> See Gershon 2021

<sup>91</sup> See Shōda 2007

<sup>92</sup> See Lisiecki 2016: 31

<sup>93</sup> See Nihonshoki, transl. by Aston 1896: 111; Kojiki, transl. by Chamberlain 1882: 179

<sup>94</sup> See Antoni (a) 2021: 1-3

<sup>95</sup> For explanation of the term see Flood 2013: 32

been utilized by politicians who justified their actions and political agendas with the supposed “wishes” of the first Japanese ruler.<sup>96</sup>

Anyway, the constant disputes between traditionalists and modern scholars in regard to the circumstances around the beginning of the Japanese state eventually make a precise periodization extremely difficult. Be that as it may, modern archaeological methods (for example, the radiocarbon dating<sup>97</sup>) are still able to prove that around 300 B.C. the population inhabiting the Japanese archipelago had reached a highly developed level of society and culture. Moreover, these processes were further propelled by the constant contacts with the continent, the Korean peninsula in particular.<sup>98</sup> Modern studies also argue that during the generally accepted span of the Yayoi period, that is 300 B.C. – 300 A.D., the tribes on the territory of modern Japan had already begun to organize themselves into bigger socio-political structures such as the kingdom of Yamatai.<sup>99</sup> The Chinese Book of Wei also partly proves these theories, as it narrates of the country Wa and its ruler Himiko.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, however, these historical evidences doesn’t explain how the Imperial House of Japan came into being. New and not so new studies on the matter such as these of Egami Namio, Klaus Antoni or Jacques Kamstra connect the establishment of a ruling class (House) on the archipelago with the invasions from the continent: the so-called “Horse-rider theory”.<sup>101</sup> While that theory had also its critics, it presents a possible explanation for the establishment of the Japanese Imperial House, thus serving as a direct opposition to the mytho-history narrated in Kojiki and Nihonshoki.

Anyway, the establishment of a centralized Japanese state under a sole ruler inevitably propelled the development of religious and cultural life. As a result, the indigenous beliefs of the people were eventually united under what would later be called Shintô.<sup>102</sup> In it, a central place was occupied by the cult of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The reverence toward a deity connected with the sun was and still is a subject of many discussions. Some traditional scholars such as Charles Eliot or Asakawa Kan’ichi defend the view that namely the cult of Amaterasu could be seen as the sure proof of the continental presence on the islands. Apparently such beliefs were typical of other Asiatic indigenous religions.<sup>103</sup> Other studies such as that of Stuart Picken connect the origins of Shintô with several traditional roots such as animism, nature worship, ancestral reverence, shamanism, agricultural rites, or lustration, all of which could have possibly belonged to the “religions” of the different tribes that had initially inhabited the islands.<sup>104</sup> While Picken also finds similarities between the Japanese indigenous beliefs and some continental religious movements (for example, Taoism), he also supports the view that

“Japanese culture may well have drawn elements from Northeast Asia, because metalwork – and later Buddhism – came through Korea. [...] Nevertheless, these factors do not preclude the possibility of designating the borrowed items as Japanese, because it was the emerging Japanese culture that integrated them into a worldview that later became part of Japan’s cultural identity.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See Shinmin no Michi and Kokutai no Hongi

<sup>97</sup> See American Chemical Society 2016

<sup>98</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 22

<sup>99</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 22/25

<sup>100</sup> See Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 13

<sup>101</sup> See Kojiki, transl. by Antoni 2012: 308; Egami 1973; Kamstra 1967: 39/40

<sup>102</sup> See Naumann 1988: 137

<sup>103</sup> See Eliot 1959: 181; Asakawa 1903: 31/32

<sup>104</sup> See Picken 1994: 9/10

<sup>105</sup> Picken 1994: 11/12



Thus, in his position he stands closer to Japanese scholars such as Motoori Norinaga who dedicated themselves to distinguishing the essentially Japanese from the borrowed (Chinese or Korean). Anyway, the development of the indigenous beliefs of the people also supported the establishment of a clergy. Albeit not similar to the modern notions of the cloth due to its lack of a clear stratification, the future Shintô had its high priest, that was the emperor, and local religious heads, in most cases that position was filled by women. The latter phenomenon could be considered the last remnants of the old times when the female functioned as a bridge between the realm of the deities and the human world.<sup>106</sup>

Parallel to these developments, the contacts with the continent introduced a wholly new religious belief into Japan: that of Buddhism. Interestingly enough, there are as many different theories about the introduction of Buddha's teaching into the Yamato state as there are opinions in regard to the establishment of the Imperial House of Japan. One of them, albeit controversial<sup>107</sup>, lauds a Korean immigrant with a Chinese origin<sup>108</sup> called Shiba Tattô who, having been an adherent to Buddhism himself, also introduced it to his new country. Another one explains the import of the foreign teaching with the Korean embassies during the reign of Emperor Kinmei (r. 539 – 571).<sup>109</sup> In any case, the newly introduced religion soon became a reason for political strife. During the reigns of Emperor Kinmei's successors up to the rule of Yômei (r. 585 – 587), there were constant quarrels and even armed conflicts between the pro-Buddhist party represented by the Soga clan and the pro-Shintôist party to which the families Mononobe, Nakatomi and Ôtomo belonged. As it would be discussed later, there are indications that the reason for these conflicts should be sought not in religion but rather in politics. Apparently the traditional families represented by Mononobe, Nakatomi and Ôtomo saw Buddhism as a direct threat to their influence at court and thus strived to suppress its further propagation on Japanese soil. On the other hand, the Soga, who shared a border with the lands of the immigrants and thus had the opportunity to become acquainted with Buddhism, saw in the new teaching an opportunity to attain political power and to establish themselves as the cultural, and political, powerhouse in the country.<sup>110</sup> These developments, which threatened to shaken the pillars of the state, eventually forced the emperors to action. Thus, a long line of Japanese sovereigns took it to their hearts to put Buddhism under their control. Here, one should note the efforts of Emperor Suiko during whose reign a Buddhist clergy was established.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, her Crown Prince Shôtoku Taishi, who is lauded with the compilation of the so-called Seventeen-Article Constitution in 604<sup>112</sup>, made another important step in the creation of the Japanese Buddhism – he utilized Confucianism in order to bring Shintô and Buddhism closer to one another.<sup>113</sup> A similar strategy was later used by Emperor Tenmu (r. 673 – 686) who, instead of Confucianism, utilized a mixture of continental teachings such as Taoism, yin-yang, medicine, astronomy and so on in order to strengthen his own authority. At the same time, however, he also used the foreign teachings in order to incorporate Buddhist practices into Shintô and vice versa.<sup>114</sup> Eventually, the establishment of Buddhism as a state religion reached its apogee during the reign of Emperor Shômu, father of the future Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Ardent Buddhist himself, the emperor constantly encouraged the Buddhist party at his court<sup>115</sup> to the point that he eventually

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<sup>106</sup> See Parać 2015: 147

<sup>107</sup> See Kamstra 1967: 250

<sup>108</sup> Shiba Tattô's origins as well as his actual existence are still a subject of discussion., See Holcombe 1999: 289

<sup>109</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 59

<sup>110</sup> See Hall 2008: 53

<sup>111</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol. 2, transl. by Aston: 154

<sup>112</sup> The existence of the historical figure Shôtoku Taishi is still a subject of many discussions., For more information see Lee 2007: 31-43; Yoshida (b) 2005: 146; Kume 1988

<sup>113</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 129

<sup>114</sup> See Ooms 2016: xix/162

<sup>115</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 18/19

commissioned the construction of a large Buddha statue at the Tōdaiji Temple in 743. Another direct result of his actions was the creation of the so-called Hachiman cult. As it would be discussed later, initially an insignificant Shintō deity with unclear origins<sup>116</sup>, Hachiman suddenly became almost the most revered god in the pantheon of the indigenous beliefs, putting even the Sun Goddess Amaterasu in the shade.<sup>117</sup> While the studies on the matter also see some political agendas on Shōmu's side<sup>118</sup>, it is also a fact that the Hachiman cult was born out of the sovereign's desire to unify Buddhism and Shintō, and to promote the former as a state religion, a feat which he eventually achieved.

As all these cultural and historical processes took place within the Japanese state, the role of the females also changed. Initially the main religious figures in the early tribal system<sup>119</sup>, the women apparently also preserved these functions after the establishment of a unified state. Thus, a political structure was created in which the men served as secular leaders, who handled the political and economic matters, while the women took upon themselves the role of spiritual leaders of the community.<sup>120</sup> One such case was the reign of Queen Himiko, the ruler of the Yamatai state. According to the Book of Wei, she practiced *kidō*<sup>121</sup> (鬼道), which could be translated as “the way of the souls”. From that phrase, it could be concluded that she served as main priestess of her community who supposedly performed the funeral rites for the deceased. Such seems to also had been the case with Himiko's successor, Iyo. According to the Book of Wei, after Himiko's death, it was a man who ascended the throne. Having been unable to rule the country, however, he was dethroned and “Himiko returned” through the “shamaness” Iyo.<sup>122</sup> From that narrative, it could be assumed that Iyo established a connection with Himiko's soul through a shamanistic trance, thus enabling the latter to “return”. The continuation of the tendency of female shaman-rulers could be seen during the reign of Empress Jingū, the mother and regent of Emperor Ōjin (r. 270 – 310). According to the old mytho-histories Kojiki and Nihonshoki, Jingū's most important role was to communicate with the gods and to deliver their will to the people. At the same time, namely that religious function contributed to her having been revered as the de-facto ruler of the state.<sup>123</sup> With the further development of the Yamato state and the unification of the set of indigenous beliefs later to be known as Shintō, the women continued to serve in their capacity as shamanesses but this time to the indigenous deities. As a result, females were chosen to serve as main priestesses of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu at Ise, or of Hachiman at Usa. In the case of Ise, for example, it was often female members of the Imperial family who were chosen for that important position. As it would be discussed later, they fulfilled not only a religious but also a political function.<sup>124</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the import of new teachings such as Buddhism and Confucianism into Yamato caused a slow change in the attitude toward women in general. For example, later Confucian texts compiled, interestingly enough, by women preached about the virtues which one woman ought to possess in order to be accepted as a valuable member of society.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the image of the female in many original Buddhist scriptures was both as seductress and embodiment of evil, and a

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<sup>116</sup> See Kanda 1985: 37

<sup>117</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 23/29

<sup>118</sup> See Bender (e) 1980; Scheid (a) 2014

<sup>119</sup> See 肥前國風土記 [Hizen no Kuni Fudoki], 佐嘉郡 [Saga-gun], transl. by Aoki 1997: 259

<sup>120</sup> See Aoki 2015: 19

<sup>121</sup> See Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951

<sup>122</sup> See Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 16

<sup>123</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol. 2, transl. by Aston 1896: 225/226; Kojiki, transl. by Chamberlain 1882: 284

<sup>124</sup> Such an example is the appointment of Emperor Shōmu's daughter, Princess Ōku as high priestess at Ise., see Picken 1994: 14/Ooms 2016: 191

<sup>125</sup> See Asia for Educators/Analects for Women by Song Ruo Zhao, transl. by de Bary, Bloom 1999: 821/824

mother. At the same time, the women were seen by the Buddhist clergy as an obstacle to enlightenment, since she could lure the novitiates back to their previous life.<sup>126</sup> To be precise, however, despite the sure introduction of these notions in the Yamato state in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, initially one could not see any major changes in the attitude toward the women. Eventually, however, the situation began to change, with the clearest example of that having been the decline in the female authority inside the Imperial family. The appointment of Princess Ôku, the daughter of Emperor Tenmu, as main priestess at Ise was only the first case among many other. An indication for the diminished position of the women could be considered the fact that she was appointed by the emperor himself, a clear sign that the female was not seen as the only bridge between the realm of the deities and the human world anymore, but rather as a tool which could be utilized by politically powerful men.<sup>127</sup> The same tendency could be seen if one considers the other important role which a female member of the Imperial House could play: that of a spouse. In many cases, Imperial Princesses were used as tools for the continuation of the Imperial line through their marriages to powerful courtiers or princes.<sup>128</sup> All things considered, during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the women lost their undisputed religious role and were diminished to objects which could be used by powerful men. From that point of view, one could understand the negative descriptions of female rulers as puppets in the hands of their male courtiers. Nevertheless, even knowing the political circumstances in the Asuka- and Nara-period Japan, one could not generalize the image of all female sovereigns who ruled during these epochs.<sup>129</sup> While it is true that some of them were not as astute as others, it is also a fact that they ascended the throne during politically turbulent times, thus becoming the patrons of the changes which took place within the Japanese society.<sup>130</sup> From that point of view, a general opinion on all female rulers in the history of the Imperial House is close to impossible. As it would be seen, even the establishment of a predominantly accepted view in regard to a single ruler such as Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku proves to be extremely difficult due to the controversies which surrounded her life and two reigns. From that point of view, it is no wonder that a dominant opinion on the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan was established not during or shortly after her lifetime, but much later, one could even speculate that it was formed only in modern times. Therefore, in order to be able to better understand the main tendencies which influenced the said view(s), it would be best to divide the current chapter into two parts: the first one would present the general sentiments in regard to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku which could be found in the original Japanese sources, while the second one would concern itself with the secondary literature and its portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan.

### *Historical sources*

In order for one to be able to assess whether one source is neutral or biased, one should know the circumstances which influenced its compilation. That means that one should first analyze the historical, and political, time during which the said text was created as well as the author's own background. Only then would a general assessment in regard to the objectivity of a historical source be possible. From that point of view, a closer look at the old Japanese sources would prove that Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's contemporary chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* had been the only neutral source in regard to her life and political achievements. From that point on, all other histories, *setsuwa* collections, or even handscrolls, the dominating artistic medium during the Edo period, developed its own opinion on the matter which in some cases strongly deviated from the information presented in *Shoku Nihongi*.

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<sup>126</sup> See Paul/Wilson 1985: 3/6

<sup>127</sup> See Ooms 2016: 191

<sup>128</sup> See Sakurada 2016

<sup>129</sup> According to Kan Eishi, the Asuka and Nara periods welcomed the highest concentration of female rulers in the history of the Imperial House., See Kan 2002: 24

<sup>130</sup> See Kan 2002: 25

Being the continuation of Nihon Shoki, Shoku Nihongi covers the history of the Imperial House from the reign of Emperor Monmu (r. 697 – 707) until the 10<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Kanmu's rule (791). Namely the latter's time on the throne saw the completion of the work in 797 at the hands of Fujiwara no Tsugutada and Sugano no Mamichi. Interestingly enough, the circumstances around these two men could not be more different. Firstly, while Tsugutada had been a member of the powerful Fujiwara house and as such had been able to serve as minister at court, Mamichi's most notable achievement was his appointment as a tutor of Crown Prince Ate, who later became Emperor Heizei (r. 806 – 809). Then, while Tsugutada's lineage ensured his high societal position, such was not the case with Mamichi. Apparently he could trace his roots back to the Korean peninsula<sup>131</sup>, which inevitably put him on a lower social stance than his colleague. Considering these two points, it would be no wonder if the political views of the two men turned out to be also different. It could clearly be expected that, as a fellow member of the Fujiwara family, Tsugutada would have favored the emperors Shōmu and Kōken/Shōtoku. On the other hand, having been a Confucian scholar, Mamichi would have defended the traditional views which accompanied the Chinese teaching. However, as it seemed, Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku had in no way been traditional. She had been the first, and so far, the only, woman to be appointed to the position of Crown Prince, which would surely have influenced Mamichi's view on her reign.

From political point of view, it could also be expected from Shoku Nihongi to be biased in its narrative concerning the last female ruler of Nara Japan. As it happened to be, she was the last member of a branch of the Imperial family, the first member of which had been Emperor Tenmu. Kōnin, her successor on the throne, belonged to the opposing Tenji line and it was later his son who was enthroned under the name Kanmu. From that point of view, one could expect a very negative description in regard to a ruler who had been a part of an opposing branch of the Imperial family. Interestingly enough, however, such is not the case. The parts which could be attributed to Shoku Nihongi's compilers, that is the chronicles as opposed to the Imperial edicts of the sovereigns themselves, could be described as being neutral to positive. The latter could be concluded from the last chronicle in regard to Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku which narrates her death. There, one reads the authors' criticism of the future generations which apparently regarded the last female ruler of Nara Japan with hatred: "*the future generations spoke of the Emperor with hatred and portrayed her with prejudice.*"<sup>132</sup> That sentence indicates that even during the lifetime of Emperor Shōtoku one could already observe the formation of the negative sentiments toward the last female ruler of Nara Japan.

The most prominent example of these feelings would be the setsuwa: short satirical stories most often compiled by monks, the purpose of which was to show the faults in the sinful human nature and thus to lead the readers to the right path of life. In the current work, there are two setsuwa collections which would be discussed: Nihon ryōiki, compiled at the end of the Nara and the beginning of the Heian period by monk Kyōkai, and the Kamakura period Kojidan by Minamoto no Akikane. As it would be seen, regardless of the historical era or their author, their narratives in regard to the last female ruler of Nara Japan follow the same pattern: she is portrayed as a sinful woman who was weak before the charms of her monk minister Dōkyō. What is worse, however, is the fact that their supposed love, or for that matter sexual, relationship is exaggerated to such an extent that one sees very graphic descriptions of their love life or their activities in bed.<sup>133</sup> Despite their initial intent to act as a moral guide to the people, these stories strongly deviate from the information presented in Shoku Nihongi and could even be considered insulting toward a member of the Imperial House and a former ruler.

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<sup>131</sup> See 新撰姓氏録 [Shinsen Shōjiroku], Vol. 3, 右京諸藩下 [Ukyō Shohan-ka]

<sup>132</sup> Shoku Nihongi, Hōki 1.08.17

<sup>133</sup> See 日本靈異記 [Nihon ryōiki] 38; 古事談 [Kojidan]

Here, it could not be concluded that the negative portrayal had anything to do with the historical era or political pressure. Despite having been compiled after the death of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, *Nihon ryôiki* could be more or less considered her contemporary. There had not been enough time for the historical narrative reflected in *Shoku Nihongi* to become blurred under the influence of the years. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Emperor Kanmu during whose reign monk Kyôkai began to compile his work would have influenced the portrayal of his Imperial predecessor in a *setsuwa* collection but not in an official chronicle. In the case of *Kojidan* compiled in the Kamakura period, enough time had passed since the death of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and there could have been the possibility that Minamoto no Akikane had decided to follow a certain agenda which deviated from the *Shoku Nihongi* narrative. At the same time, it should be noted that the Kamakura period was strongly influenced by religious movements which concentrated on salvation. From that point of view, it seems highly unlikely that *Kojidan*'s narrative was guided by the passage of time. Instead, it could be assumed that Akikane rather followed the dominant religious beliefs at the time which concentrated on sins and the potential ways to achieve salvation. A proof of that could be found in the fact that the author decided to abandon his political career and to take the tonsure, thus compiling *Kojidan* as a Buddhist monk. To sum up, one could see that the first element which could have potentially influenced the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was not politics but rather religion.

Then, another factor could be seen reflected in *Jinnô Shôtoki*, a genealogy of the Imperial House compiled in the Muromachi period by Kitabatake Chikafusa. Despite its official character, the chronicle is strongly biased by the author's own views on matters regarding the Imperial succession, and the social and political order of the state. To a certain extent, Chikafusa's sentiments could be well understood. After all, he had been a renowned scholar and courtier who was an eyewitness of the division within the Imperial House which remained in history as the *Nanboku-chô* period (the Northern and Southern Courts period). As a supporter of one of the parties (the Southern Court represented by Emperor Go-Daigo)<sup>134</sup>, Chikafusa surely wanted to support his cause. From that point of view, one could easily understand his sentiments and sometimes drastic theories based on the belief of the "direct line" (*shôtô*) of the Imperial House.<sup>135</sup> According to that view, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku did not belong to the said direct line and could therefore be never accepted as a rightful ruler. Another factor which influenced Chikafusa's narrative could be traced back to religion. He defended certain views on the importance and value of the imperial regalia which could be traced back to Ise Shintô. The said religious movement, however, had adopted a mixture of ideas that originally belonged to Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, yin-yang, and the five elements system.<sup>136</sup> From that point of view, it could be understood why Chikafusa defended the opinion of the so-called "*ordering of Japanese society*"<sup>137</sup> according to which "*the positions of those high and low in society are fixed*".<sup>138</sup> That view more or less resembled the teachings of some Confucian scholars which considered women as socially inferior to the men. Thus, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was labeled as a sinful woman who didn't adhere to her predestined place in society.<sup>139</sup> All things considered, in the case of *Jinnô Shôtoki*, one could not attribute the lack of objective narrative solely to religious influences. Instead, one could see a mixture of politico-religious factors which, albeit not directly targeting the historical texts, left their imprint on them. One could not blame the Imperial court for having exerted any direct pressure on Kitabatake

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<sup>134</sup> See Varley 1980: 1/7

<sup>135</sup> See Varley 1980: 17/18

<sup>136</sup> See Varley 1980: 13

<sup>137</sup> See Varley 1980: 25

<sup>138</sup> See Varley 1980: 164

<sup>139</sup> See *Jinnô Shôtoki* [神皇正統記]/Varley 1980: 144/147

Chikafusa in regard to his portrayal of the emperors of Japan. However, the sole fact that the author had been a courtier partial to one of the conflict sides sufficed for his biased depiction of history.

While in the case of Jinnô Shôtoki, it would be seen how the political circumstances in the state could negatively, albeit indirectly, influence the historical narrative, the Edo period work *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran* and the handscroll series of Utagawa Hiroshige III could be used as an example of the opposite. Compiled by Hayashi Gahô, *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran* presents a rather politically unbiased view on the two reigns of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku: a thing which would have seemed unlikely considering the political situation during the Edo period and the hidden, and sometimes not so much, struggles between the shôgunate and the court. Unfortunately, however, the work is influenced by the cultural tendencies at the time which were represented by the Neo-Confucianism. Thus, one could feel a subtle criticism of Emperor Kôken's decision to depose Crown Prince Funado – an act which contradicted the Neo-Confucian views on filial piety.<sup>140</sup> Then, except the parts which strongly demonize Dôkyô<sup>141</sup>, the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku's reign remains relatively objective. As it would also be seen, Gahô's work strives to present a certain character development of the last female ruler of Nara Japan – from an unfilial daughter to a principled ruler who, according to the narrative, met her death at Dôkyô's hands due to her unwillingness to appoint him as her successor. Another rather positive, albeit not completely objective, portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku could be found in the handscroll series “Kôken-tei no monko Yuge no Dôkyô kensei no zu” [孝謙帝の門子弓削の道鏡憲政の図, “Depiction of the rule of Yuge no Dôkyô, the monk [supported by] Emperor Kôken”] by Utagawa Hiroshige III. As it would be discussed later, the author uses the theme of the so-called phallic contests as a creative way to portray the last female ruler of Nara Japan as an epitome of female strength.<sup>142</sup> It should be noted that Hiroshige does not completely run away from things which were not explained by the official history *Shoku Nihongi*, for example the nature of the relationship between Shôtoku and Dôkyô. He leaves the reader room for free interpretation by alluding to the emperor's unwillingness or inability to control her monk minister who was free to organize such immoral events at court.

All things considered, it would be seen that the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan was almost never completely neutral. There were factors such as religion, political circumstances at court or cultural influences which directly or indirectly influenced the authors' narratives, thus creating a biased, sometimes even untruthful, depiction of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Interestingly enough, compared to the *setsuwa* collections, the Japanese histories never fully develop the motif of the supposed sexual relationship between the emperor and Dôkyô. The matter is mentioned but there are no end assessments in regard to Emperor Shôtoku's rule which are based only on the alleged love affair. In that detail, the old Japanese chronicles differ from works such as the *setsuwa* collections or, as it would be seen, from some Western studies which emphasize the theme to the point that it apparently becomes the sole reason for the exclusion of the women from the order of succession of the Japanese Imperial House.<sup>143</sup>

### *Secondary literature*

Before one could start to analyze the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in secondary literature, it should be made clear that there are slightly different tendencies in the Western and the Japanese sources. While the majority of the Western literature focuses on certain aspects of the life and reign(s) of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku (for example, her supposed love affair with Dôkyô), the most Japanese

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<sup>140</sup> See *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran*, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

<sup>141</sup> See *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran*, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 79/80/81

<sup>142</sup> See pp. 335/336

<sup>143</sup> See Piggott 2003: 47

studies create a thorough portrayal of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku, beginning with her appointment to the position of Crown Prince and ending with the Dōkyō Incident. Thus, the latter have the advantage of having a wider range of controversial issues at their disposal. An example of such problematic point could be found in the book “Women in the ancient and medieval times, and Buddhism” [古代・中世の女性と仏教; *Kodai・chūsei no josei to bukkyō*] by Katsuura Noriko where the author addresses the appointment of Imperial Princess Abe to the position of Crown Prince.<sup>144</sup> Then, in his book “Dōkyō”, Yokota Ken’ichi makes an effort to cover all controversial issues which could be found in the life and two reigns of the last female emperor of Nara Japan. Eventually, one sees the author’s attempt to create a psychological portrait of the Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku according to which she had apparently been a person with a strong will and a fierce temperament.<sup>145</sup> Then, Yokota addresses her relationship with Dōkyō. He rejects the idea of a potential love affair and strongly supports the view that the sovereign respected the monk’s knowledge and talents, thus having seen him as a friend rather than a lover. He also expresses the opinion that the emperor’s loneliness caused by the death of her parents and her lack of contact with her half sisters Inoe and Fuwa could be considered the driving force behind the establishment of the relationship between Shōtoku and Dōkyō.<sup>146</sup> On that point, one should also mention Takinami Sadako’s book “Kōken tennō: the last female emperor” [最後の女帝孝謙天皇; *Saigo no jotei Kōken tennō*]. While not deviating from the major historical narrative about Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku, Takinami presents a variety of untraditional views in regard to the life and two reigns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, which suffices to make the work a worthy subject of analysis. One example is the death of Prince Asaka, half brother of Imperial Princess Abe. Considering the influence of the Fujiwara family during the reign of Emperor Shōmu, Kōken/Shōtoku’s father and her predecessor on the throne, and the succession issue caused by the lack of male heir born to the sovereign by his empress, there is ground to assume that Asaka, unrelated to Fujiwara by blood, was regarded as a competition against Shōmu’s only living child by his Fujiwara empress, Imperial Princess Abe, and had been possibly assassinated by the powerful courtiers. Takinami Sadako, however, attributes the prince’s death to natural causes, potentially the disease beriberi or even heart failure.<sup>147</sup> Another untraditional view is related to the Dōkyō Incident. Takinami sees the whole event as Emperor Shōtoku’s strategy to prevent the possibility of the monk ever ascending the throne. The author even suggests that for that purpose the sovereign sought out the help of her loyal courtier Wake no Kiyomaro who was ordered to bring back a second oracle denying a potential enthronement of Dōkyō.<sup>148</sup> Having said that, it is interesting to see that the author doesn’t completely exclude the possibility of the emperor having held deeper feelings toward her monk minister. When speaking of their relationship, Takinami does not directly express the view that there was love between them, but instead uses a word with a vague meaning which could be translated as “love” but also as “favor” or “affection” depending on the context and the person translating the book into another language.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, Takinami Sadako’s book is a clear example of how historical narratives can be utilized to prove one’s own opinion on a certain matter. Instead of using sources such as *setsuwa* stories or more or less biased genealogies such as *Jinnō Shōtōki*, the author bases her views mainly on *Shoku Nihongi*, the only contemporary source for the life and two reigns of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. Then, she skillfully supports her own views with passages from the official chronicle, thus creating a rather fresh

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<sup>144</sup> See Katsuura 2003: 121

<sup>145</sup> See Yokota 1988: 96/97

<sup>146</sup> See Yokota 1988: 98/100

<sup>147</sup> See Takinami 1998: 62/63

<sup>148</sup> See Takinami 1998: 190

<sup>149</sup> See Takinami 1998: 190

and definitely untraditional portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan which deserves to be discussed further in the work.

While the previous three examples show how an author could utilize the official historical sources in order to present his own views by balancing on the edge between objectivity and subjectivity, there are also books in which the authors cross that imaginary line. Such is the case with the book “The female emperors of ancient Japan” [古代日本の女帝; Kodai nihon no jotei] by Ueda Masaaki. There, one sees the view that Emperor Shôtoku had supposedly fallen in love with Dôkyô’s vast knowledge and loyal service. Apparently that feeling had been so strong that she eventually wanted to make the monk her successor. The author describes the whole Dôkyô Incident as a conflict between the party of the defenders of the principles of traditional Imperial succession and that of the supporters of the Chinese principle according to which a ruler could be dethroned and replaced if he lost Heaven’s mandate due to his own lack of virtue. Moreover, he also concludes that it was apparently that internal politico-ideological struggle which influenced the reception of the rule(s) of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in a negative way.<sup>150</sup> Then comes the book “History of the Japanese women 2: The shining female emperors and empresses” [日本女性の歴史 2 輝ける女帝と后; Nihon josei no rekishi 2 kagayakeru jotei to kasaki] in which one could see an attempt at generalization regarding Kôken/Shôtoku’s role in the exclusion of women from the order of succession of the Imperial House. According to the dialogue between the writers Enchi Fumiko, Inoue Yasushi and the historian Murai Yasuhiko, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku had apparently been a rather weak ruler who was dependent first on her mother Kômyôshi and then on Dôkyô. The critics go as far as to express the view that it was the emperor who actively wanted to promote the monk by eventually appointing him as her successor. Apparently namely that wish of hers played a decisive role for the future of the women in the Imperial House of Japan.<sup>151</sup>

On that place, one could also mention Sakaguchi Angô’s books “Dôkyô” and “The boy Dôkyô” [道鏡童子; Dôkyô dôji] which could also be considered biased in regard to the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. In contrast to the historical scientific books presented above, however, Sakaguchi’s works could be described as historical novels, which means that they could not and actually do not claim authenticity and absolute precision in regard to the known details of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku’s life and politics. In his interpretation of history, the author puts all the blame which is to be found in the last female ruler of Nara Japan’s life and rule(s) on her parents who apparently didn’t see her as an independent human being but rather as their extension, as a tool, the purpose of which was to serve them and their wishes.<sup>152</sup> Eventually, the attitude of her parents “crippled”<sup>153</sup> the then-Imperial Princess Abe to such a point that she later began to seek love there where it simply didn’t exist: according to Sakaguchi’s interpretation, Kôken/Shôtoku first fell in love with her cousin Fujiwara no Nakamaro and only then with Dôkyô.<sup>154</sup> While not in the least corresponding to the official historical narrative in regard to the relationship between the last female ruler of Nara Japan and her courtiers Nakamaro and Dôkyô, Sakaguchi Angô’s book of the same name presents a different point of view of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku’s life and achievements. In contrast, his second book on the matter “Dôkyô dôji” presents some opinions which could also be found in historical chronicles. Such is the case with the author’s interpretation of Dôkyô’s descent. According to Sakaguchi’s reading of the matter, the

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<sup>150</sup> See Ueda 1996: 214, 217, 221

<sup>151</sup> See Akatsuki Kyôiku Tosho 1978: 32

<sup>152</sup> See Sakaguchi (a) 1947: 10

<sup>153</sup> Sakaguchi (a) 1947: 10

<sup>154</sup> Sakaguchi (a) 1947: 12/18



monk could trace his predecessors back to Emperor Tenji, and he was also connected by blood to the ancient clans Soga and Mononobe. Interestingly enough, a similar interpretation of Dôkyô's blood connection with the Mononobe could be found in a historical source from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Sendai kuji hongji, also known as Kujiki.<sup>155</sup>

After the short presentation of the most important tendencies in the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in Japanese historical and belletristic works, it is now time to look at the Western secondary literature. The first name which ought to be mentioned here is doubtlessly that of Ross Bender. A renowned scholar of matters regarding eighth-century Japan, he also offers the biggest collection of scientific works centered on the last female ruler of Nara Japan and thus is the main contributor to the cause of introducing her to the Western world. Bender's most commendable feat is that he fully utilizes the Japanese official chronicles, in the case Shoku Nihongi, when compiling his own books and essays. He even presents a full translation of the Imperial edicts (senmyô) in Shoku Nihongi<sup>156</sup>, thus giving the Western reader the opportunity to learn how the Nara emperors ruled the realm (according to Delmer Brown, the Imperial edicts are considered transcriptions of the sovereign's words which were written down at the moment of their utterance<sup>157</sup>). He also offers a full translation of the chronicles from the year Tenpyô shôhō 1 (749)<sup>158</sup> – the year in which Emperor Shômu abdicated and his daughter Crown Prince Abe ascended the throne under the name of Emperor Kôken. As the author himself explains, the reason for his decision to translate the full Shoku Nihongi chronicle of that year is that

“The year Tenpyô Shôhō 1 [...] was one of the most momentous years in the eighth century, an era teeming with dramatic political intrigue, rebellions and succession disputes.”<sup>159</sup>

Moreover, he also wanted to offer the reader “*a direct window into the mid-eighth century and [to] highlight[...] crucial events of the Nara period in a way which has not been provided before.*”<sup>160</sup> Beside his direct work on Shoku Nihongi, Bender also offers a wide range of essays and books concerning the most important peculiarities of Nara Japan and the reign of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in particular – beginning with the conspiracy of Tachibana Naramaro, going through the omen apparatus created by Emperor Shôtoku in order to support her claim to the throne and finally arriving at the Dôkyô Incident.<sup>161</sup> Here, it should be said that in his narrative Ross Bender almost always remains objective and neutral to the matters which he presents. The only description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku with a slightly negative connotation could be found in his essay “*Changing the Calendar. Royal Political Theology and the Suppression of the Tachibana Naramaro Conspiracy of 757*” where one reads that Emperor Kôken's enthronement happened only due to the lack of an alternative at the time (he uses the French phrase “*faut de mieux*”).<sup>162</sup> In all other cases, Bender seldom expresses his own opinion as emotionally as it could be seen in the Japanese sources mentioned above. That peculiarity could be attributed to his thorough work with the original Japanese chronicles. As a result, he presents the facts

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<sup>155</sup> See 先代旧事本紀 [Sendai Kuji Hongi], Vol. 5, 天孫本紀 [Tenson hongji]

<sup>156</sup> “The Imperial Edicts in the Shoku Nihongi. A Translation with Text and Transliteration” (2018)

<sup>157</sup> See Brown (b) 2006

<sup>158</sup> „Shoku Nihongi – The Year Tenpyô Shôhō 1. A translation with introduction and annotations” (2012)

<sup>159</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (i) 2012: 2

<sup>160</sup> See Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (i) 2012: 2

<sup>161</sup> „Auspicious Omens in the Reign of the Last Empress of Nara Japan, 749–770” (2013), “Changing the Calendar Royal Political Theology and the Suppression of the Tachibana Naramaro Conspiracy of 757” (2010), “Performative Loci of the Imperial Edicts in Nara Japan, 749-70” (2009), “The Hachiman Cult and the Dôkyô Incident” (1979, a thesis), “The Political Meaning of the Hachiman Cult in Ancient and Early Medieval Japan” (1980), “The Last Female Emperor of Nara Japan 749-770” (2021)

<sup>162</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 238

and only then makes an assessment of the information. That could be best seen in his essay *“The Hachiman Cult and the Dôkyô Incident”* where the author concludes that after his political elevation the Buddhist monk never managed to take full control of the government, the reason for that being that he could never rid himself of the Fujiwara officials at court. That, combined with his inability to put his own people on state positions, predestined his downfall after the death of Emperor Shôtoku.<sup>163</sup> In the same essay, Ross Bender presents the views of Japanese scholars, which will be discussed later in the current work, in regard to the personalities of the last female ruler of Nara Japan and Dôkyô based on their calligraphy.<sup>164</sup> As it could also be seen in the said example, the author does not express an opinion influenced by his own views on the matter. He supports his claims with official sources, be it Japanese chronicles or modern studies. The same peculiarity could be seen in the essay *“Auspicious Omens in the Reign of the Last Empress of Nara Japan, 749-770”* where the author expresses the view that Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku showed signs of self-doubt in her edicts: a trait which could be seen most clearly in the *“context of serious political threats to the throne and to her reign”*.<sup>165</sup> Upon reading that sentence, one could think that it contains the opinion of the author. As it would later become clear during the analysis of the Imperial edicts of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, however, the self-doubt of the last female ruler of Nara Japan could be found in the proclamations as a part of her deliberate political strategy at that particular moment. Thus, Bender’s “opinion” once more turns out to be a presentation of details or events which could be supported by the official sources. Nevertheless, considering the fact that the Western reader seldom has the opportunity to read the Japanese sources in original, Ross Bender’s decision to support his assessments with the old chronicles or modern Japanese studies could be well understood. Thus, he not only introduces a theme interesting to him but also can hope to wake the Western readers’ interest in Japanese history and old chronicles.

After seeing that a thorough work with the Japanese chronicles could produce an outstanding, and mostly neutral, work, it is now time to look at the studies which express a more critical opinion and to analyze the potential reason(s) for it. For example, in his essay *“Japanische Herscherinnen”*, Ulrich Pauly expresses critical and very negative opinion on the relationship between Shôtoku and Dôkyô. That of itself would not have been a problem at all if Pauly didn’t decide to use a phrasing and word choice which would have been better suited for a setsuwa collection but not for an official historical study. Thus, for example, the author goes as far as to describe the last female ruler of Nara Japan as having been *“sexually dependent”*<sup>166</sup> on her monk minister. While such notions are well exaggerated, here one could see an even worse tendency: some of Pauly’s phrases or words seem borrowed from the setsuwa collection *Nihon ryôiki*, for example that the emperor and the monk shared a pillow in her bedchambers.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, as it would also be explained in detail later, the purpose of the setsuwa stories was never to present historical knowledge precisely, but rather to utilize it and to reshape it in a moral teaching for the masses. From that point of view, Pauly’s decision to follow the style of that certain Japanese genre instead to use historical chronicles such as *Shoku Nihongi* seems more than peculiar, and it would be most interesting to analyze the results derived from it.

Another example of a critical work concerning the last female ruler of Nara Japan is the essay *“Eine Kaiserin auf Japans Thron? Die Zukunft des japanischen Kaiserhauses”* by Eva-Maria Meyer. While not as critical and apparently not influenced by the setsuwa style, the study also presents some controversial views. According to Meyer, during her first reign, Emperor Kôken had been controlled by

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<sup>163</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 140

<sup>164</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 139

<sup>165</sup> See Bender (a) 2013: 64

<sup>166</sup> See Pauly 2007: 24

<sup>167</sup> See Pauly 2007: 24; 日本靈異記 [Nihon ryôiki] 38

her mother Empress Dowager Komyōshi and her kinsmen from the Fujiwara family, Nakamaro in particular. Then, after the death of Shōmu's empress, the last female ruler of Nara Japan apparently sought the aid of the Buddhist monk Dōkyō.<sup>168</sup> Then, the author expresses the controversial view that Emperor Kōken held Emperor Junnin responsible for the rebellion of Fujiwara Nakamaro: "*sie machte Junin-Tennō für den Aufstand des Nakamaro verantwortlich*".<sup>169</sup> Although these opinions are certainly untraditional, unfortunately, they could not be supported by the official chronicle. As an analysis of the Shoku Nihongi chronicles would later show, neither was Emperor Kōken influenced by Komyōshi and Fujiwara no Nakamaro nor had she sought the aid of Dōkyō. The same could be said about Emperor Junnin's role in the rebellion of Nakamaro. He was not blamed for but was actually responsible for the situation since he was completely controlled by his Prime Minister to the point that he even supported him during his revolt. A potential reason for Eva-Maria Meyer's controversial views could be found in the sources used by her in the compilation of her work. As it could be seen at the end of her narrative, she apparently worked not with the original Japanese sources, but rather with a secondary literature: the book "*A Guide to the Imperial Succession: How the Succession of the Imperial Throne took place*" [歴代天皇総覧: 皇位はどう継承されたか; *Rekidai tennō sōran: kōi wa dō keishōsareta ka*] by Kasahara Hidehiko. Thus, one could see one of the major mistakes committed by the Western authors and already discussed in the chapter "*The 'interpretational steps' of Johann Gustav Droysen*": instead of working directly with the original Japanese chronicles, they prefer to use secondary literature, which inevitably leads to controversies and lack of objectivity on one or another matter.

The same mistake, but on an even larger scale, was committed by Guida M. Jackson in her book "*Women Rulers Throughout the Ages*". There, one can read that Emperor Kōken had been "*more interested in religion than government*" and that she was eventually "*persuaded*" by Fujiwara no Nakamaro to abdicate in favor of Emperor Junnin.<sup>170</sup> Regarding her relationship with Dōkyō, one reads that "*she allowed herself to be dominated by the bonze [...] who may have been her lover.*"<sup>171</sup> According to Jackson, Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion was raised not against Kōken but rather against Dōkyō.<sup>172</sup> As it would be seen later on, all these are views controversial in many aspects. However, the culmination of Guida's inaccurate historical narrative could be found in the penultimate sentence: "*Her amorous abandon with the ambitious Dōkyō prompted Japanese nobles to vow that no more women would rule.*"<sup>173</sup> As it would be seen later in the current chapter and also further in the work, that view is both biased and inaccurate. Thus, one could only wonder what influenced such subjective historical narrative. Similar to the previous case where Eva-Maria Meyer used secondary literature as a main source for her analysis, Guida M. Jackson apparently also preferred to use the studies of her colleagues. What is worse, however, is the fact that while Meyer used a Japanese secondary literature, Jackson based her research only on Western books: in the case, E. Papinot's "*Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan*", Edwin O. Reischauer's and John K. Fairbank's "*East Asia: The Great Tradition*" and George Sansom's "*A History of Japan to 1334*". Doubtlessly, the said authors had used, if not the original Japanese chronicles, then Japanese secondary literature for their narratives. Thus, their texts were already influenced by the views expressed there. Then, by utilizing the works of her Western colleagues, Guida M. Jackson's narrative turned out to be affected by both her own views on the

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<sup>168</sup> See Meyer 2003: 249

<sup>169</sup> Meyer 2003: 250

<sup>170</sup> See Jackson 1999: 220

<sup>171</sup> Jackson 1999: 221

<sup>172</sup> See Jackson 1999: 221

<sup>173</sup> Jackson 1999: 221

matter and by the opinions expressed by the authors of the said Western books: a problem already discussed at length in the chapter “*The “interpretational steps” of Johann Gustav Droysen*”.

Anyway, the sentence of Guida M. Jackson could serve as an introduction to another untraditional view in regard to the last female ruler of Nara Japan: that of Joan Piggott in her essay “*The last classical sovereign Kôken-Shôtoku Tennô*”. There, the author firmly rejects the notion of scholars such as Guida M. Jackson who hold Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku responsible for the exclusion of women from the order of succession in the Imperial House of Japan.<sup>174</sup> Instead, she argues that

*“Eighth-century Japanese attempts to institutionalize the Chinese practice of royal patrilineal succession resulted in female sovereignty, but at the same time deepening acculturation of Sinic ideals of male rulership was steadily delegitimizing female monarchs.”<sup>175</sup>*

According to that notion, in a society where the Chinese ideals regarding the succession were beginning to establish themselves as the norm, a female sovereign such as Kôken/Shôtoku would have always been criticized and underestimated. From that point of view, Joan Piggott offers a much different perspective than other Japanese and Western studies. She doesn’t seek the fault in the historical personalities but rather in the philosophical ideas of the time, as well as in the cultural influences in Nara Japan which first undermined the authority of the female rulers and later deprived them of the opportunity to leave meaningful traces in history. Considering Piggott’s view in regard to the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, it should be no wonder that the author describes Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku as a strong and “*willful ruler*”<sup>176</sup> who could be considered equal, or even superior, to her male counterparts. From that point of view, Joan Piggott also finds the notion of a potential love relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô highly unlikely, if not impossible. As she explains,

*“I view Dôkyô as Shôtoku’s primary lieutenant, in a role replicating that occupied by Nakamaro earlier, although the monk Dôkyô was much more dependent on his monarch than Fujiwara Nakamaro, scion of a ministerial family, had been.”<sup>177</sup>*

Thus, the author offers a rather different narrative concerning the circumstances of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku’s life and politics, which would be discussed at length later. In contrast to some Japanese and the most Western sources for which a certain detail of a ruler’s reign had been enough to define him as good or bad, Joan Piggott adopts a different approach: she delves deep into the political and ideological background of the Nara society, thus finding a vortex of outer factors which could have possibly influenced the rule of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and, by extension, her later portrayal.

To sum up, it would be quite difficult to find a dominant discourse in regard to the description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. There is always a huge rift dividing the sources portraying her in a good light (powerful ruler) and those which draw her in dark colors (weak and sinful woman). Interestingly enough, however, both parties had their own reasoning about their respective description, be it political or religious interferences, personal views, or artistic choice, which makes their narrative seem convincing for the reader. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to find an objective portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, with the only representatives of such being Shoku Nihongi, her contemporary chronicle, and the massive modern research of Ross Bender which targets the Western

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<sup>174</sup> See Piggott 2003: 47

<sup>175</sup> Piggott 2003: 47

<sup>176</sup> Piggott 2003: 62

<sup>177</sup> Piggott 2003: 60

audience. All that serves to prove that Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku is one of those complex historical figures which are very hard to assess and understand. Her actions awake contradicting emotions and force the researcher to delve deeper into history in order to be able to grasp her intentions, with not even being sure that the drawn conclusion corresponds to the truth. In any case, the personality and the reigns of the last female emperor of Nara Japan do not leave the reader, or for that matter the writer, indifferent: a fact which helps but also burdens the researcher who had to assess an immense amount of written sources in order to be able to come to a definitive conclusion regarding her portrayal.

## THE BIRTH OF A STATE: MYTHOLOGICAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JAPANESE STATE

### The creation of a political myth: Emperor Jimmu and the birth of the Japanese statehood

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapters, the Imperial House of Japan claims to be the oldest monarchy in the world with a line unbroken since the ascension of the first Emperor Kami-yamato Ihare-biko, better known as Jimmu-tennō. Those statements are mainly based on the two oldest Japanese mytho-historical texts Kojiki and Nihonshoki, both compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. with the insignificant difference of mere eight years between each other (Ō no Yasumaro finished Kojiki in 712, while Prince Toneri put Nihonshoki together in 720). Both texts present a history of Japan beginning with the cosmogonic myth, a main part of which is the creation of the archipelago by the deities Izanagi and Izanami. Later on, their descendant, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, dispatched her grandson Kami-yamato Ihare-biko to the islands in order for him to act as “...a sort of intermediary between deities (within the so-called “the cult of the sun”) and the later Japanese emperors, thus legitimizing their power over the country.”<sup>178</sup> Martin Lisiecki gives a thorough analysis of the narrative concerning the “appropriation” of the archipelago by the godly messenger who later remained in the mytho-history of Japan as Emperor Jimmu. According to him, the journey of Kami-yamato Ihare-biko followed a certain pattern characteristic for the general process of gaining power throughout the ages.

“Typically, there are two, mutually exclusive ways of taking power: by force, or, as in democratic regimes — via legal elections. Once power was gained, however, both paths had, and have, one element in common: the need to maintain it. [...] ensuring the continuity of power and that of state institutions is not only the most difficult but also the most important task facing political actors.”<sup>179</sup>

Therefore, upon arriving in what is nowadays called Japan, the future Emperor Jimmu began to search for a suitable place for his residence. On his way he subdued all tribes who dared to oppose him, thus ensuring his ultimate control over the territories. Eventually, after defeating all opposition, on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the year tsuchi-no-to-hitsuji (662 B.C.), he proclaimed:

“During the six years that our expedition against the East has lasted, owing to my reliance on the Majesty of Imperial Heaven, the wicked bands have met death. It is true that the frontier lands are still unpurified, and that a remnant of evil is still refractory. But in the region of the Central Land there is no more wind and dust. Truly we should make a vast and spacious capital, and plan it great and strong.

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<sup>178</sup> Lisiecki 2016: 31

<sup>179</sup> Lisiecki 2016: 31

At present things are in a crude and obscure condition, and the people's minds are unsophisticated. [...] Now if a great man were to establish laws, justice could not fail to flourish. [...] Moreover, it will be well to open up and clear the mountains and forests, and to construct a palace. Then I may reverently assume the Precious Dignity, and so give peace to my good subjects. Above, I should then respond to the kindness of the Heavenly Powers in granting me the Kingdom, and below, I should extend the line of the Imperial descendants and foster rightmindedness. Thereafter the capital may be extended so as to embrace all the six cardinal points, and the eight cords may be covered so as to form a roof. Will this not be well?

When I observe the Kashiha-bara plain, which lies S.W. of Mount Unebi, it seems the Centre of the Land. I must set it in order."

Accordingly he in this month commanded officers to set about the construction of an Imperial Residence."<sup>180</sup>

In the year after having established his residence in Kashihara, the newly ascended emperor decided to strengthen his hold on power by the means of Imperial marriage. Kojiki narrates that he chose

"...Princess Ahira, younger sister of the Duke of Wobashi in Ata, and begot children: there were two, —His Augustness Tagishi-mimi, next His Augustness Kisu-mimi. But when he sought for a beautiful maiden to make her his Chief Empress, His Augustness Oho-kume said: "There is here a beautiful maiden who is called the august child of a Deity. The reason why she is called the august child of a Deity is that the Princess Seya-datara, daughter of Mizokuhi of Mishima, was admired on account of her beauty by the Great-Master-of-Things the Deity of Miwa [...] Then I-suke-yori-hime was standing first among the beautiful maidens. Forthwith the Heavenly Sovereign, having looked at the beautiful maidens, and knowing in his august heart that I-suke-yori-hime was standing in the very front, replied by a Song, saying:

"Even [after nought but] a fragment[ary glimpse], I will intertwine the lovely [one] standing in the very front.

[...] The names of the august children thus born were: His Augustness Hiko-ya-wi, next His Augustness Kamu-ya-wi-mimi, next His Augustness Kamu-nuna-kaha-mimi" (Three Deities.)"<sup>181</sup>

Thus, the Imperial line was ensured for the next generations and, according to popular belief which is very much alive even in modern times, the Imperial family nowadays consists of the progeny of that first emperor who descended from Heaven as grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. While it could be surmised that Jimmu's hold on power was decided even in the year tsuchi-no-to-hitsuji, that is 662 B.C., after the defeat of his enemies, the official chronology appoints the year after his marriage, that is kanoto-tori (660 B.C.), as the official beginning of his reign as an emperor.

Nevertheless, while both texts give valuable information about the early situation on the Japanese archipelago and the beginning of statehood there, their narratives leave room for doubt about the accuracy of the reports – a peculiarity which ought to be discussed in detail. In the first place, it would be very much plausible for one to follow Klaus Antoni in his search of an answer to the question *"warum zu Beginn des achten Jahrhunderts unserer Zeitrechnung zwei separate Annalenwerke mit nahezu identischem Gegenstand in einem Abstand von nur acht Jahren parallel am Kaiserhof zu*

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<sup>180</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 111

<sup>181</sup> Kojiki, transl. by Chamberlain 1882: 179

*Heijōkyō entstanden.*<sup>182</sup> The first response would be to see into the structure and the composition of the two texts. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that

“Während das Kojiki eher ein poetisch fortlaufendes Narrativ erzählt, ist das Nihonshoki dem Bemühen verpflichtet, statt Geschichten tatsächlich Geschichte zu präsentieren. Das Vorbild dafür lieferten bekanntlich die offiziellen Dynastiegeschichten Chinas...”<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, as Klaus Antoni explains,

„Während dem Kojiki ein eher narrativer, zudem auch religiöser Charakter eigen war, der erst in der japanischen Neuzeit und Moderne zur höchsten Akzeptanz und ideologischen Präsenz des Werkes führen sollte, war das Nihonshoki in Aufbau, Sprache und Inhalt gänzlich dem chinesischen Vorbild verpflichtet und konnte daher, so eine fundierte Ansicht der historischen Forschung, im diplomatischen Verkehr mit den Staaten des Kontinents als Referenzwerk für den Nachweis eines eigenen, gleichwertigen staatlichen Ranges gegenüber den Staaten Chinas (und Koreas) eingesetzt werden. Anders als das eher schlicht konzipierte Kojiki konnte das Nihonshoki den Ansprüchen jener Tage an eine anspruchsvolle historiografische Referenzschrift genügen, die auch außerhalb des eigenen Landes, im diplomatischen Verkehr, als „präsentabel“ erschien.”<sup>184</sup>

On balance, one could probably understand the need for the compilation of two separate chronicles within the span of mere eight years. It is obvious that Kojiki and Nihonshoki pursued different purposes – while the first chronicle utilized religious and mythical elements to present known historical facts, the second one tried to emulate the Chinese official texts and thus to underpin the position of the Yamato state as a cultured and highly civilized country.

As it was previously discussed, the early Japanese state was strongly influenced by continental ideologies and religions. Some of them like Buddhism and Confucianism took root in the archipelago and were naturalized to become Japanese Buddhism and Japanese Confucianism, respectively. Nevertheless, considering the years in which both texts were compiled (712/720) as well as the time in which the continental influences began to find their way into Japan (since the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century), there was not enough time for the Chinese teachings to be completely assimilated and adjusted to the understandings of the island state. Therefore, they more or less retained their original shape and were used by the Japanese society in their raw form. That could be best seen in Nihonshoki which, as already discussed, strictly followed the structure and the narrative of the Chinese chronicles. They, on their part, followed the principles of Confucianism, according to which “...[es] war [...] die Anciennität des Staatwesens, die über dessen Würde und Rang entschied.”<sup>185</sup> In that aspect, the Middle Kingdom had found a definite way to support its claims to monarchic continuity:

“Als ein wesentliches Kriterium für die Authentizität der dynastischen Annalen Chinas galt die kontinuierlich dokumentierte Chronologie einer Abfolge von Dynastien und deren Herrscher im Verlauf der Geschichte. In China bot die offiziell geführte Liste der Herrscher die Grundlage für den dynastischen Anspruch des Staatswesens an sich, interessanterweise ungeachtet der historischen Tatsache wechselnder Dynastien, deren Legitimität jeweils durch die

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<sup>182</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 1/2

<sup>183</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 2

<sup>184</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 3/See Kojiki, transl. by Antoni 2012: 271/469

<sup>185</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 3

nachfolgende Dynastie in Form eines offiziellen Geschichtswerkes zu erfolgen hatte. So blieb die Kontinuität der legitimen Herrschaft auch bei wechselnden Dynastien gewahrt.“<sup>186</sup>

In order to prove itself as equally civilized and old country, the Yamato state decided to utilize a different strategy.

“In Japan dagegen wurde, mit den beiden genannten Quellenschriften als Anfangspunkt, von Beginn an das Konstrukt einer genealogisch fundierten, ununterbrochen fortschreitenden dynastischen Kontinuität gepflegt.“<sup>187</sup>

Only thus would have been possible for a small island country like Japan to counter the Chinese claims about being a civilized and cultured state based on the continuity of its Imperial House. However, the Japanese had the ambition to not only answer the challenge of the Middle Kingdom but also to win the dispute. For that purpose, the need arose for the island country to invent a history based on a calendar system which would be able to prove the existence not only of a monarchy rooted in antiquity but also of an Imperial House, the line of which has been unbroken since its establishment. The result was the compilation of Kojiki and, later on, Nihonshoki which

“[...] präsentieren eine fortlaufende Linie von Kaisern, beginnend mit Kamu-Yamato-Iwarebiko (Kurzform Iwarebiko); das Kojiki führt die Liste bis zur bereits genannten 33. Herrscherin Suiko (554–628), während das Nihonshoki diese um weitere acht fortsetzt, bis zu Jitō-tennō (645–703), der 41. Herrscherin dieser traditionellen – und wie nicht weiter betont werden muss, für die ersten Kaiser rein legendären – Chronologie.“<sup>188</sup>

As it could be seen, both sources tried to create a certain chronology of emperors which in both cases begins with the figure of the ruler who remained in history simply as Jimmu-tennō. Interestingly enough, both Kojiki and Nihonshoki end with the reigns of female rulers – Suiko and Jitō, respectively.

Nevertheless, upon closer examination of the two texts, one finds certain discrepancies in regard to the lives and reigns of the first fourteen monarchs (fifteen, if one also counts Empress Jingū among them) in the Imperial line, which casts shadow on the possibility of these rulers having actually existed. In the case of Jimmu, for example, both Kojiki and Nihonshoki report that he lived for a period much longer than 100 years (137 and 127, respectively), thus giving a supposedly human figure rather inhuman capabilities. Some would explain that discrepancy with Jimmu's descent: he had been, after all, a grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and thus it could have been possible that he still retained some of his godly characteristics. Another much more plausible explanation, however, would be that of Klaus Antoni who explains the inconsistency in the narrative with the Japanese utilization of the Chinese calendar system based on the so-called 60-year cycle.

“Im chinesischen Zodiak folgen zwölf Tiere aufeinander in einem unendlichen Kreislauf, Jahr für Jahr. [...] „Zwölf Zweige“ (jap. jūnishi), die Ratte, der Büffel, der Tiger, der Hase, der Drache, die Schlange, das Pferd, das Schaf, der Affe, der Hahn, der Hund und das Schwein.

Die zwölf Zweige werden in der chinesischen - und darauf aufbauend auch japanischen – Kosmologie nun kalendarisch verbunden mit den „Fünf Stämmen“ (jap. gogyō), die den chinesischen fünf Grundelementen (auch Wandlungsphasen) entsprechen, als da sind: Holz, Feuer, Erde, Metall und Wasser. Diese erfahren zur genaueren Klassifizierung eine weitere Dichotomie, in Japan jeweils in einen „jüngeren Bruder“ bzw. „älteren Bruder“, in China in Yin

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<sup>186</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 3

<sup>187</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 3

<sup>188</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 3



und Yang. Jenes System wird in Japan jikkan genannt. Die Kombination aus diesen Reihen (jikkanjūnishi 十干十二支) ergibt schließlich einen Zyklus von insgesamt sechzig Jahren, den genannten „Sechzigerzyklus“ (jap. eto 干支), welcher der traditionellen Zeitrechnung in ganz Ostasien zugrunde liegt. Jedes Jahr innerhalb eines solchen Zyklus ist durch eine spezifische Kombination von Tierkreiszeichen und Element in der jeweiligen Unterkategorie eindeutig bestimmt.“<sup>189</sup>

Interestingly enough, instead of creating a whole new calendar system influenced by the 60-year cycle of the Middle Kingdom, the compilers of Nihonshoki decided to incorporate their own mytho-history into the existing Chinese calendar, thus setting the beginning of Emperor Jimmu's reign not at the start of a cycle but rather within it. Thus,

“Das erste Jahr der Herrschaft des Iwarebiko beginnt laut Quelle mit dem ersten Tag des ersten Monats des Jahres shin-yū, bzw. kanoto-tori 辛酉 („Metall-Hahn“), also dem 58. Jahr des Zyklus nach chinesischer Rechnung.“<sup>190</sup>

The meaning hidden behind the said year, as explained by Matsumura Kazuo, could not be easily ignored.

“The ascension of Jimmu was placed in a Shinyū year (660 BCE), which in China was designated as a year of great revolution. The Nihon shoki compilers set the present as their starting point, and projected a chronological lineage into the past, even as they left the future chronology open. At the same time that they modeled the record after Chinese annals, they spliced in mythology, and were able to emphasize the peculiar trait that the imperial lineage was of divine blood.”<sup>191</sup>

Therefore, the said kanoto-tori year established itself, not without the support of the two earliest chronicles of Japan, as the year in which the beginning of Japanese statehood and the Imperial House, respectively, had been set. The plausibility of that statement was not discussed until after the Meiji period when modern science based on archaeological evidences began to support the theory that the earliest human traces on the Japanese archipelago could be dated back to a much earlier date<sup>192</sup> than the supposed beginning of statehood under the reign of Emperor Jimmu.

Those developments, however, could not diminish the influence of the myth of the first mythical Japanese emperor. Even before the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1889, the father of Emperor Meiji, Emperor Kōmei (r. 1846 – 1867), decided to support the notion of Jimmu having been the ancestor of the Imperial House of Japan.

“[...] am Fuße des nahegelegenen Berges Unebi, liegt ein Hügel, der als Ort des Kaisergrabes (miasagi 陵) des Jimmu-tennō gilt, das Mausoleum Unebi-goryō 畝傍御陵. [...]

In einem Erlass (gosata 御沙汰), datiert auf den 4. April 1863, bestimmte er [*Kōmei-tennō*] selbst den Ort des sogenannten Jibu-den 神武田, welcher seit dem Mittelalter immer wieder mit dem Grab assoziiert worden war, als den tatsächlichen Ort der Grabstätte Jimmus:

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<sup>189</sup> Antoni (b) 2022: 21

<sup>190</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 5

<sup>191</sup> Matsumura 2017:

<sup>192</sup> At least 11,000 B.C., For theories and research on the matter see Habu 2004: 26/Keally (a) 2004

„Bezüglich der Angelegenheit des Jinmu-tennōryō befehlen wir, das Jibu-den [als den korrekten Ort] zu bestimmen.“<sup>193</sup>

Modern studies eventually proved that such mausoleum never actually existed and was commissioned by the Imperial family only after the promulgation of Emperor Kōmei's Imperial edict.

“TAKAGI [*Senshi*], dessen Untersuchung im Deutschen als „Konstruktion einer mythologischen Frühgeschichte in der Moderne“ wiedergegeben werden kann, fasst den Gegenstand und die Ergebnisse seiner Studien dahingehend zusammen, dass bis zum Ende der Bakumatsu- Zeit der Unebi-Hügel (unebiyama) abgeschieden inmitten der Reisfelder des Takaichi-Distrikts in der Yamato-Provinz gelegen habe. Im dritten Jahr der Bunkū-Ära (1863) jedoch sei in einem Abschnitt des Dorfes Misanzai, nordöstlich des flachen Berges Unebi, unvermittelt der Boden aufgeschüttet und das runde Hügelgrab des Jinmu-tennō errichtet worden.“<sup>194</sup>

As it could be seen, the notion that Jimmu had been an actual person was strongly supported even before the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Moreover, it was the Imperial House itself which tried to legitimize the myths recorded in *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*. Considering the known facts about Emperor Kōmei's reign, it could be assumed that he despised the position of the court during the Edo period and wanted to oppose the Tokugawa government in an effort to regain the lost Imperial authority. Coincidentally, during Emperor Kōmei's reign, due to various factors the bakufu had entered the last stages of its hold on power. Pressured from inner opposition, on the one hand, and the inadequacy of the shōgun and his advisors, on the other hand, the government could not exercise authority in the same domineering manner which characterized the Tokugawa rule at its beginning. Moreover, foreign ships began to reach the Japanese coasts one after another and the West demanded concessions which the government was unable to deny due to the lack of military power necessary to oppose the invaders. All those developments had considerably weakened the bakufu and its hold on power. On the other end stood Emperor Kōmei who tried to regain the authority conceded to the Tokugawa more than 200 years ago. Dissatisfied with the unequal treaties with the Westerners signed by the government without his consent, he threatened to abdicate as a sign of protest – something which he eventually never did. To exert further pressure on the bakufu, the emperor issued his “Order to expel barbarians” in 1863, while it was perfectly clear that the foreigners would be dissatisfied with the decree and would most likely respond to the challenge with force. Coincidentally or not, it was also in 1863 when Emperor Kōmei promulgated his edict in regard to the mausoleum of Jimmu-tennō. Simply put, it could be assumed that the sovereign tried to utilize the myths from the old chronicles in order to underscore the importance of the Imperial House for the (future of the) state and thus to further undermine the authority of the military government – a strategy which in the long run would have led to Tokugawa's loss of power and the emperor regaining it.

Regardless of whether that tactic of Emperor Kōmei actually contributed to the fall of the Tokugawa bakufu and the Meiji Restoration or not, it is a known fact that the Meiji government and Kōmei's son, Emperor Meiji, continued to support the notion of Jimmu as the actual ancestor of the Imperial House. In the first article of the constitution promulgated on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1889 one could read that

“Article 1. The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Antoni (b) 2022: 12/13

<sup>194</sup> Antoni (b) 2022: 14

<sup>195</sup> The Constitution of the Empire of Japan 11.02.1889

In his “Imperial Oath at the Sanctuary of the Imperial Palace”, Emperor Meiji expanded the meaning of those words further by proclaiming that

“We, the Successor to the prosperous Throne of Our Predecessors, do humbly and solemnly swear to the Imperial Founder of Our House and to Our other Imperial Ancestors that, in pursuance of a great policy co-extensive with the Heavens and with the Earth, We shall maintain and secure from decline the ancient form of government.

In consideration of the progressive tendency of the course of human affairs and in parallel with the advance of civilization, We deem it expedient, in order to give clearness and distinctness to the instructions bequeathed by the Imperial Founder of Our House and by Our other Imperial Ancestors, to establish fundamental laws formulated into express provisions of law, so that, on the one hand Our Imperial posterity may possess an express guide for the course they are to follow, and that, on the other, Our subjects shall thereby be enabled to enjoy a wider range of action in giving Us their support, and that the observance of Our laws shall continue to the remotest ages of time. [...] These Laws come to only an exposition of grand precepts for the conduct of the government, bequeathed by the Imperial Founder of Our House and by Our other Imperial Ancestors. That we have been so fortunate in Our reign, in keeping with the tendency of the times, as to accomplish this work, We owe to the glorious Spirits of the Imperial Founder of Our House and of Our other Imperial Ancestors.”<sup>196</sup>

As it could be seen from these two passages, both the newly promulgated Meiji Constitution and the emperor himself supported the idea of “*a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal*” which was to govern the state as per the “*instructions bequeathed by the Imperial Founder of Our House and by Our other Imperial Ancestors.*” It was openly accepted that Emperor Jimmu founded the Imperial House and thus set the beginning of a rule which remained unbroken “*for ages eternal*”. Modern studies on that matter come to the conclusion that even the date of the promulgation of the constitution was deliberately chosen to be the 11<sup>th</sup> of February.

“Mit der Wahl des 2.549. Jahrestags der mythischen Thronbesteigung Jimmus habe die japanische Führung betont, dass die japanische Moderne mit den frühesten Ursprüngen der kaiserlichen Dynastie in unauflöslicher Verbindung stehe. So markiert der 11. Februar 1889, unter Rekurs auf eine fiktive älteste Vergangenheit, tatsächlich die offizielle Geburtsstunde des modernen Japans!”<sup>197</sup>

As it could be seen, the date was chosen as the direct continuation of the mythical establishment of statehood by Emperor Jimmu in the year kanoto-tori (660 B.C.). By promulgating the constitution of the new state on the same date in the year 1889, the Meiji government, with the support of the emperor, wanted to present itself as the creator of the new Japan in much the same way as Jimmu established the old Yamato state which existed until the end of the Edo period. As if to underscore that point, in 1889 the statesmen and Emperor Meiji commissioned the construction of Kashihara-jingū (橿原神宮) to honor “the first emperor” Jimmu and his empress.<sup>198</sup>

Nevertheless, the political propaganda on the theme continued in later times and reached its peak during the Shōwa period when texts such as Kokutai no hongī openly supported the notion that

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<sup>196</sup> The Constitution of the Empire of Japan 11.02.1889

<sup>197</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 25/26

<sup>198</sup> See Antoni (b) 2022: 12

“... Kaiser Jimmu den Thron mit einem erhabenen, tiefen und großen Geist begründet habe, der die Vereinigung nicht nur des ganzen Reiches, sondern auch die Inklusion der ganzen Welt im Sinn gehabt habe.”<sup>199</sup>

Another text from the period, *Shinmin no michi*, emphasized

„...den Slogan *hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇 aus der Kriegszeit, der sich auf einen Ausspruch des Jimmu-tennō im *Nihonshoki* bezog (wörtlich „acht Ecken, ein Dach“), dass der Geist der Ausweitung der kaiserlichen Mission in der Gegenwart hauptsächlich auf dem Geist Kaisers Jimmu zur Zeit der Reichsgründung beruhe.”<sup>200</sup>

As it could be seen, while the scientific and archaeological studies denied the existence of a ruler named Emperor Jimmu, it was in the interests of the politicians to support the myth of the first sovereign of Japan and his creation of the Japanese statehood, thus constructing the so-called “political myth”.

In his study on the theme, Christopher Flood differentiates between sacred and political myth. According to him,

“The term *myth* designates a story which has the status of sacred truth within one of more social groups but which would probably not be taken as sacred or literally true by the observer who labelled it as myth. [...]

Myth is a form of explanation. Sets of relationships are depicted: relationships between gods and gods, gods and man, gods and nature (animals, plants, places, the seasons and the weather, night and day, episodic occurrences, such as volcanic eruptions), man and man, man and nature, nature and nature. This constitutes an explanation of what the world is and how it came to be so. [...]

Myth can disclose the meaning of a group’s spatial and temporal sense of itself. Through myth, the members of the group know the meaning of the sacred sites which mark out their location on the land.”<sup>201</sup>

In that aspect, the initial narratives of *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* in regard to Emperor Jimmu fulfill the requirements stated by Flood and could be described as “sacred myth(s)”.

The same could not be said, however, about the Jimmu-related ideology shortly before and after the Meiji Restoration. Emperor Kōmei’s edict in regard to Jimmu’s mausoleum, the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution on the date of the establishment of the Japanese statehood by Emperor Jimmu, as well as the nationalistic slogans from the Shōwa period could be categorized as “political myth”. According to Flood,

“In the modern context, then, a political myth can be defined as an ideologically marked account of past, present, or predicted political events. By ideologically marked, I mean that the narrative discourse carries the imprint to the assumptions, values, and goals associated with a specific ideology or identifiable family of ideologies, and that it therefore conveys an explicit or implicit invitation to assent to a particular ideological standpoint. [...]

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<sup>199</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 26

<sup>200</sup> Antoni (a) 2021: 26

<sup>201</sup> Flood 2013: 32

The choices among possible alternatives in the selection of information, the attribution of qualities, motives, and objectives to historical actors, inferences concerning relationships of cause and effect, use of descriptive terms or other lexical items, grammatical constructions, overall organization, location of the narrative, and any other factors are all relevant insofar as they contribute to the orientation of the discourse in the direction of one ideological current as opposed to another. [...]

Mythmaking is a communication process which involves reception as well as (re)production. To state that a narrative is mythopoeic is merely to judge the properties of the discourse itself, without reference to how that discourse is received by an audience. But to be the expression of a *myth* the telling of a given narrative in any particular instance needs to be perceived as being adequately faithful to the most important facts *and* the correct interpretation of a story which a social group already accepts or subsequently comes to accept as true.”<sup>202</sup>

As it could be seen from Christopher Flood’s description of the most important aspects of the political myth, all three examples stated above meet the requirements needed to be categorized as such. While it could not be said that the modern Japanese political world had created the Jimmu myth anew, it could rather be stated that the politicians utilized the mytho-historical narrative in order to achieve their own agendas. In that aspect, Flood comments that

“The notion of ideological marking includes what is there in the discourse, what it actually says by virtue of the words it uses. But the notion also covers ideologically pertinent aspects of what lies outside the boundaries of the discourse, in terms of what it might have said, yet did not say, by virtue of the value-relevant choices of topic and treatment involved in its production as this particular discourse rather than any other.”<sup>203</sup>

As it was discussed, Emperor Kōmei most likely utilized the Jimmu myth in order to strengthen his own authority and to further weaken that of the Tokugawa government. Later on, the Meiji politicians used the same strategy in order to present themselves as Jimmu’s political successors in the establishment of the modern Japanese statehood. While such statement had not been made directly, the choice of a date for the promulgation of the Constitution as well as the “Imperial Oath” of the Meiji emperor would have sufficed for anyone to understand their general idea. In the case of the political slogans in *Shinmin no Michi* and *Kokutai no Hongi*, both propagandistic texts from the Shōwa period, there the method used had been much more direct as it utilized Jimmu’s “own words”. According to Nihonshoki, upon the establishment of his capital in Kashihara, he stated that

“上則答乾靈授国之徳、下則弘皇孫養正之心。然後、兼六合以開都、掩八紘而為宇、不亦可乎。”<sup>204</sup>

*[Above, I should then respond to the kindness of the Heavenly Powers in granting me the Kingdom, and below, I should extend the line of the Imperial descendants and foster rightmindedness. Thereafter the capital may be extended so as to embrace all the six cardinal points, and the eight cords may be covered so as to form a roof.]*<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Flood 2013: 42/43

<sup>203</sup> Flood 2013: 42

<sup>204</sup> 日本書紀 [Nihonshoki], Chapter 3, 神武天皇即位前紀己未年三月丁卯条の「令」 [Jinmu-tennō sokuizen-ki tsuchi-no-to-hitsuji sangatsu hinotō-jō no rei]

<sup>205</sup> Nihonshoki, transl. by Aston 1896: 131

On that, Aston comments that *“The character for roof 宇 also means the universe. The eight cords, or measuring tapes, simply mean “everywhere.”*<sup>206</sup> In any case, however, it would be difficult for one to understand that statement as one directed toward world domination.

As it was already discussed, in his analysis of the political concepts to be found in the Jimmu chronicle in Kojiki, Martin Lisiecki expresses the idea that Kami-yamato Ihare-biko’s original purpose was to be *“...a sort of intermediary between deities (within the so-called “the cult of the sun”) and the later Japanese emperors, thus legitimizing their power over the country.”*<sup>207</sup> Lisiecki’s statement could be supported with passages from Kojiki where one finds the Sun Goddess’ reasoning about why her descendants should rule over the Japanese archipelago:

*“The Luxuriant-Reed-Plains-the-Land-of-Fresh-Rice-ears-of-a-Thousand-Autumns, — of Long-Five-Hundred-Autumns is painfully uproarious, — it is.”* With this announcement, he immediately reascended, and informed the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity. Then the High-August-Producing-Wondrous-Deity and the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity commanded the eight hundred myriad Deities to assemble in a divine assembly in the bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven, and caused the Deity Thought-Includer to think [of a plan], and said: *“This Central Land of Reed-Plains is the land with which we have deigned to charge our august child as the land which he shall govern. So as he deems that violent and savage Earthly Deities are numerous in this land, which Deity shall we send to subdue them?”*<sup>208</sup>

It could, therefore, be concluded that Jimmu’s mission had been to reclaim only the Japanese archipelago as per the Sun Goddess’ orders. And it had been that territory which Amaterasu saw as *“the land with which we have deigned to charge our august child as the land which he shall govern.”* From that point of view, Jimmu’s statement in regard to his capital which had to *“embrace all the six cardinal points, and the eight cords may be covered so as to form a roof”* could in no way be understood as words directed toward world domination. As it could be seen in the nationalistic texts from the Shōwa period, however, the mythical first emperor’s words were taken out of context and adapted to serve a certain political agenda. Thus, similar to the Meiji politicians, the Shōwa political figures also presented themselves as Emperor Jimmu’s successors in the mission to unite the world under Japanese rule.

In sum, it could be concluded that while Emperor Jimmu as well as the other thirteen (or, fourteen) rulers after him had actually not existed, their figures were skillfully used for political purposes. They were forcefully brought to life in order to fulfill the agendas of politicians who, by deliberately ignoring the scientific evidences, took these mythical figures out of the sphere of the “sacred myth” and introduced them into the realm of the “political myth”. Thus, it was neither the old sources such as Kojiki or Nihonshoki nor the creation of a calendar based on the Chinese 60-year cycle, but mainly the politics which supported the notion that Emperor Jimmu had been a real person who, after his descent from Heaven, managed to establish the Japanese statehood.

## From mythology to factuality: findings and theories about the birth of the Imperial House of Japan

Glorious as it may sound, the Emperor-Jimmu myth doesn’t offer much help in the dispersion of the fog surrounding the birth of the Imperial line of Japan. On the other hand, archaeology was able to

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<sup>206</sup> Nihonshoki, transl. by Aston 1896: 137

<sup>207</sup> Lisiecki 2016: 31

<sup>208</sup> Kojiki, transl. by Chamberlain 1882: 112/113

prove<sup>209</sup> that certain geographical and ethnological processes, which began to take place on the Japanese archipelago as early as 30 000 years B.C.<sup>210</sup>, could take a clearer form somewhen between 2500 B.C. and 300 A.D.: a time frame which roughly covers the Middle and Later Jōmon period as well as the Yayoi period in Japanese history. Furthermore, according to archaeological excavations, a very advanced level of society accompanied by early cultic forms such as the erection of stone circles as a part of certain funeral rites could be seen as an indelible part of the Middle and Later Jōmon period.<sup>211</sup> Eventually, the appearance of rice-growing villages<sup>212</sup> and the use of iron during the Yayoi period (officially 300 B.C. – 300 A.D., there are still debates in regard to the precise periodization<sup>213</sup>), expedited the process of putting Japan and its people on the historical map of the Asian continent.<sup>214</sup> According to Delmer M. Brown, a certain Yamatai kingdom situated on the archipelago apparently established contacts with the Korean peninsula due to the local kings' need of iron ore for the production of military weapons and agricultural tools. In order to obtain the much-needed raw material, these rulers apparently sent slaves as tribute to the continental courts.<sup>215</sup> It is unclear when a centralized state on such a scale had been created, but Brown cites the Records of the Three Kingdoms, a Chinese source from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., which says:

“其國本亦以男子爲王，住七八十年，倭國亂，相攻伐歷年，乃共立一女子爲王，名曰卑彌呼...”<sup>216</sup>

*[The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Himiko [卑彌呼].*<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> “In 1946, Willard Libby proposed an innovative method for dating organic materials by measuring their content of carbon-14, a newly discovered radioactive isotope of carbon. Known as radiocarbon dating, this method provides objective age estimates for carbon-based objects that originated from living organisms. [...] The concept of radiocarbon dating relied on the ready assumption that once an organism died, it would be cut off from the carbon cycle, thus creating a time-capsule with a steadily diminishing carbon-14 count. Living organisms from today would have the same amount of carbon-14 as the atmosphere, whereas extremely ancient sources that were once alive, such as coal beds or petroleum, would have none left.”, American Chemical Society 2016

<sup>210</sup> See Mizoguchi (a) 2002: 8

<sup>211</sup> See Kidder 1993: 74

<sup>212</sup> „The combined results of radiocarbon analysis and archaeological data suggest that rice could have appeared in the Central Highlands already in the 11th century BCE when the region was occupied by people of the Final Jōmon culture group and was mainly used for ritual purposes. It then appeared in western Japan (northern Kyushu) in the 9th century BCE and continued to disperse discontinuously across eastern Japan.”, Leipe, Long, Wagner, Goslar, Tarasov 2020: 1

<sup>213</sup> See Shōda 2007: 1/7; Mizoguchi (b) 2013: 22

<sup>214</sup> „Three early Chinese references to Japan indicate that the introduction of agriculture and the use of metal was followed by extremely rapid social change. The first reference is a brief note in the dynastic history of the Former Han stating that "the Japanese people (the Wajiri) are located in the Lo-lang seas, have more than 100 states, and are periodically received [at the Lo-lang court]." The second, dated A.D. 57 and included in the dynastic history of the Later Han (A.D. 25-220), tells about a gold seal being presented to the king of the Japanese state of Na. The third is a surprisingly detailed description of a Yamatai kingdom that had more than seventy thousand households ruled by hereditary queens and kings. This can be found in the history of Wei (A.D. 221-65) compiled by a man who died in A.D. 297.”, Brown (a) 1993: 22

<sup>215</sup> Brown (a) 1993: 25

<sup>216</sup> 三國志 [Records of the Three Kingdoms], 魏書 [Book of Wei], Vol. 30: Biographies of the Wuhuan, Xianbei, and Dongyi

<sup>217</sup> Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 13

The Book of Wei could be accepted as a reliable source on the matter thanks to its detailed account of the people on the Japanese archipelago and their state called Wa. According to Tresi Nonno,

“Notes about Wa people” seems to be written by someone who really visited Japanese archipelago, as far as distances between different locations are quite close to modern estimation, also description of Wa world is rather realistic and correlates with corresponding facts of archaeology and anthropology, i.e. “Notes about Wa people” is something alike report of ancient field anthropologist. Also it is the most detailed description of Wa people. That’s why “Notes about Wa people” is the most important source about pre-Japanese society and states existed upon Japanese archipelago in second half of Yayoi epoch (1 – 3 centuries AD).”<sup>218</sup>

The whole narrative is roughly divided into three sections which explain the political life of the country, its customs, flora and fauna, and, last but not least, Queen Himiko and her international affairs. Although the Wa Queen’s name is written with characters which could be read as Bei-mu-hu, with the first one of them meaning “inferior” or “lowly”, the historical narrative doubtlessly describes namely the ruler whom the Japanese call Himiko and who held power between 189 A.D. and 248 A.D. Considering the turbulent times during which every local chieftain saw himself as a sovereign in his own right, the possibility of the appearance of a single person who could unify all kingdoms under a centralised rule could also not be excluded. The development of a higher level of agriculture through rice cultivation and the growing populace due to the better living conditions during the Yayoi period strengthened the rivalry between the various communities on the Japanese archipelago. Each and every one of them had to fight with its neighbors for more farmland and hunting fields. There should have been someone among all those kingdoms who understood that only a unified state could be stronger enough to compete against the other Asian countries, and who also possessed the military power required to enforce his ideas.

Anyway, regarding the kingdom of Yamatai and the circumstances of its creation Delmer Brown offers an analysis influenced by Yoshie Akio’s sociological study of ancient Japan. Cited from Brown, Yoshie expresses the view that

“Yamatai (whether this federation of kingdoms was located in Kyushu or central Japan is not yet clear<sup>[219]</sup>) had been established and maintained principally by the ceremonial power of priestly rulers, not by the physical power of armies and material possessions. He deduced that each kingdom within Yamatai was a community held together by common magic beliefs and practices and that a priestly ruler had delegated military and administrative tasks to one or more assistants. Although there apparently was a distinction between religious and administrative affairs, Yoshie believes that conflicts between kingdoms could have been resolved only by a king or queen who functioned as a conductor of magic rites.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Nonno 2016: 14

<sup>219</sup> On that point, Jonathan Edward Kidder comments that,

“Arguments for the location of Yamatai in either Kyushu or Yamato are the only ones worth considering. Nowhere else were there flourishing communities on the requisite commanding scale. However, one should add at this point, there is little evidence in Himiko’s time bracket for a major cult site in Kyushu, that, like Mt. Miwa, had the potential of contributing to the growth of the early religious practice.”,

From the author’s map on pp. 279 under the name “Probable route from Daifang to Yamatai”, it could be clearly seen that Yamatai had been located on the main island Honshû, most precisely in Nara Prefecture., Kidder 2007: 273, 279

<sup>220</sup> Brown (a) 1993: 26



Some evidence of the appearance of a religious leader who could eventually unite all the rivaling kingdoms into a state could be found in an essay by Hori Ichirô in which he offers the view that

“[...] at the turning points in Japanese social history, when the populace was anxious and disturbed, when customary norms fell away and the established order was tottering, in other words in situations of social anomie, Japanese shamanism, as regards its general form and functions, offered a means of adjustment.”<sup>221</sup>

At the same time, however, despite the reverence for Himiko as the unifier of the young Japanese state, archaeological findings and Chinese chronicles show evidences that the unification process was not a single occurrence restricted in time or geographical frame, but rather a gradual process which extended itself until at least the (generally accepted) end of the Yayoi period (300 A.D.) and encompassed all regions and small countries on the Japanese archipelago.<sup>222</sup> On the other hand, Chinese sources such as Song-shu [Book of the Song dynasty] (420 – 479) confirm the existence of a sovereign line in the unified Yamato state as it mentions five Japanese kings (emperors). Those are “*Ts'an (Sino-Jap.: San), Chên (Sino-Jap.: Chin), Ch'i (Sino-Jap.: Sai), Hsing (Sino-Jap.: Kô), and finally, Wu (Sino-Jap.: Bu).*”<sup>223</sup> As it is difficult to associate the Chinese names with these of any Japanese emperors who supposedly ruled during the Song dynasty in China, one could only surmise that those rulers were successors of Emperor Ôjin, whose reign, according to Kojiki and Nihonshoki, extended from 270 to 310 A.D. King Wu could therefore had been Emperor Yûryaku (r. 456 – 479). He supposedly sent a letter (significant for the matter discussed here) to the Chinese court in 478 A.D.

“Our land is remote and distant; its domains lie far out in the ocean. From time of old forebears have clad themselves in armour and helmet and gone across the hills and waters, sparing no time for rest. In the east they conquered fifty-five countries of hairy men; and in the west, they brought to their knees sixty-six countries of various barbarians. Crossing the sea to the north, they subjugated ninety-five countries. The way of government is to keep harmony and peace; thus order is established in the land.”<sup>224</sup>

From that letter, it could be surmised that the unified state of Himiko was actually nothing more than a small federation of 55, 66 or 95 small states. It could have been the basis for the unified Japanese state but in no way the end result we know today. Furthermore, the big number of those small states causes one to suspect that they were probably not states in the modern meaning of the word but rather large agricultural communities. That is a profile which fits into the social structure of the Japanese state during the late Jômon and Yayoi periods.

Nevertheless, while both archaeological findings and Chinese sources show evidence of already existing powerful families, clans or even tribes which supposedly held dominance over their neighbors

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<sup>221</sup> Hori 1975: 246

<sup>222</sup> „Most Japanese historians agree that a leader called Prince Mima headed a new federation that had its base at the foot of Mount Miwa in the Nara basin. Archaeological finds from the area suggest a political change after some armed conflicts around A.D. 300. Recent scholarship concedes that Prince Mima was probably the same man as the tenth emperor, Sujin (r. ca. 300), though his reign being the tenth in the imperial genealogy is still in dispute.

Sujin's presence in the Yamato region coincides with the beginning of a new cultural era now known by the archaeological term “the Old Tumuli” (kofun) period. Sujin extended his power from Yamato to Kii, Owari, and finally to Izumo.”, Aoki 2015: 18

<sup>223</sup> Kamstra 1967: 32

<sup>224</sup> Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 23

and were able to create a small kingdom-like federation during the later half of the Yayoi period, they don't explain how or even when the Imperial house which we know today was created. As Kôji Mizoguchi puts it,

“...the study of the Yayoi period occupied an ambiguous status in the imperial ideology; the culture was supposedly brought to the archipelago by the imperial ancestors but could not be directly connected with the deeds of the early emperors.”<sup>225</sup>

As if to explain that controversy, in his commentary on Kojiki, Klaus Antoni shares a theory, according to which the birth of the Imperial line was strongly influenced by forces unrelated to the indigenous Japanese population.

“...der >>Reitervolktheorie<<. Diese Theorie interpretiert auf recht dramatische Weise Vorgänge am Ende der frühen Kofun-Zeit, d.h. gegen Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts. In der späten Kofun-Zeit tauchen unvermittelt vollkommen neue kulturelle Elemente auf, die auf das Vorhandensein einer bislang nicht in Erscheinung getretenen, kriegerisch orientierten Reiterkultur weisen.”<sup>226</sup>

Modern readings of the same theory add new elements to it: the cultural tendencies during the later Jômon and early Yayoi period were caused by barbaric horse-riding tribes which came from North and Central Asia and reached the Japanese islands through China and Korea.

“Egami Namio (Nihon bijutsu no tanjô) ist Mitbegründer der modernen >>Reitervolktheorie<< bzw. nach Kreiner >>Reiterkrieger-Hypothese<<, die eine Wanderung von mongolischen Reiternomaden über die koreanische Halbinsel nach Japan postuliert. Diese Eroberer hätten im Nara-Becken den altjapanischen Staat und die >>Tennô-Dynastie<< gegründet. Egami stellt einen Zusammenhang her zwischen den Ereignissen auf japanischem Boden und den >>Barbaren<<-Einbrüchen in Nordchina<sup>[227]</sup> während dieser Zeit und gelangt zu dem Schluß, daß das Spät-Kofun nicht nur teilweise, sondern gänzlich kontinentalen Charakters gewesen sei. Es sei als östlicher Ausläufer der eurasischen Reiterkultur der Skythen anzusehen. Aber da Japan ein Inselland ist, sei dieser Theorie zufolge die südostasiatische Bauernkultur der Yayoi nicht verdrängt worden, sondern lediglich überlagert und habe die materielle Basis für die neue Herrscherschicht gebildet.”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Mizoguchi (b) 2013: 22

<sup>226</sup> Kojiki, transl. by Antoni 2012: 307

<sup>227</sup> In his book „Encounter or Syncretism. The Initial Growth of Japanese Buddhism“, Jacques Kamstra also presents the same theory. He bases his opinion on the ancient Chinese sources which describe the so-called “Five Hu” or also “Five barbarians”. These were supposedly barbarian tribes which flooded China in five consecutive waves. Coincidentally,

“The beginning of these invasions on China occurred at the same time as the arrival of the ‘imperial tribe’ in Japan. These Hu were nomadic people, who, relying on their fleet horses, knew how to render the local population serviceable to themselves. They have influenced world history as far as West Europe. The Huns of Attila (434-453 A.D.) and the Mongol tribes of Genghis Khan, which threatened Europe and Japan in the thirteenth century were related to them. [...] Dwelling on the edges of the Chinese empire, they exercised pressure in various directions on it. [...] Under the influence of all these movements on the northern border of Korea, one of the tribes related to the Five Hu migrated and used the Korean peninsula as a bridge to reach Japan.”, Kamstra 1967: 39/40

<sup>228</sup> Kojiki, transl. by Antoni 2012: 308

Even though such a theory seems much more plausible than a Heavenly expedition led by Emperor Jimmu who descended from Heaven as the grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, historical evidences of a possible invasion are missing.<sup>229</sup> However, Jacques Kamstra finds certain peculiarities in the Japanese religious practices during the Yayoi and Kofun periods which suggest possible contacts between indigenous beliefs and foreign influences.

“The stone circles, for instance, which have been found on Hokkaido, indicate an invasion of a Tungusian tribe which must have taken place in the fifth century. The tribe, which later expanded into the imperial race, also bore all the characteristics which were specific to such Tungusian tribes.”<sup>230</sup>

Even though one could also find evidences of the erection of stone circles from the late Jōmon period, those monuments were primarily connected with certain funeral rites, as they functioned as a barrier between the world of the living and that of the dead.<sup>231</sup> The stone circles found in northern Japan, however, have apparently had a completely different function. Their configurations with one centrally upright stone with other stones radiating from it like the spikes of a wheel, and their potential calendrical value suggest a possible form of a Sun cult typical of many Asian communities. Furthermore, the burial mounds representative of the Kofun period don't correlate with any forms of the earlier Japanese religious traditions. As it was already mentioned, in ancient times, the people were buried in graves which didn't resemble the large tumuli erected during the Kofun period at all. There are certain indications that those tumuli could be seen as a proof of the introduction of an entirely new culture and funeral rites which were completely different from those known among the indigenous people of the archipelago.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, Kamstra explains that the funeral rites of the Kofun period had many points in common with ceremonies of the same type in North Korea and generally typical of the peoples in North Asia.<sup>233</sup> Thus, the author finds a link between the Imperial line that was closely connected with the religious beliefs of the population, and invaders from continental Asia. Even the male primogeniture typical of the Imperial House of Japan could possibly be remnants of those invaders, as the leadership in the North Asiatic and Tungusian tribes followed the hereditary principle according to which the position of chieftain was passed on from father to son.

Of course, the horse-riders theory can not be proved due to the lack of evidences which could support it. It offers, however, a view different from the historico-mythological one described in *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*. Even though there is no historical evidence of foreign invasion on the Japanese archipelago during the Kofun period, one could still argue that the many developments and innovations introduced during that historical era were something which could not be indigenously Japanese simply because they were vastly different from the culture and technology from earlier times.

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<sup>229</sup> „Die Theorie [...] hat natürlich auch ihre Kritiker. [...] Es gilt jedoch festzustellen, daß mit dem 5. Jahrhundert eine neue Epoche in Japan begonnen hat, die Zeit des Yamato-Staates bzw. in archäologischer Terminologie der Kofun-II-Periode, mit der die japanischen Inseln endgültig in das vollhistorische Zeitalter eintreten. Und es ist vollkommen unstrittig, daß die historische Wirklichkeit nichts gemein hat mit den mythischen und legendären Berichten um eine vermeintliche Reichsgründung im Jahr 660 v. Chr., wie sie das *Nihonshoki* und implizit auch das *Kojiki* postuliert.“, *Kojiki*, transl. by Antoni 2012: 311

<sup>230</sup> Kamstra 1967: 45/46

<sup>231</sup> See Kidder 1993: 74

<sup>232</sup> See Keally (b) 2006

<sup>233</sup> „Besides the objects which were normally buried with the dead in earlier periods and cultures, artefacts were found here which indicate a greater dependence on the horse than previously. [...] The interest in the horse—often religious—which is shown by various remains in these graves, probably indicates a Northern Asiatic nomad tribe. This tribe might have entered from the North of Korea into Japan and come to a standstill in the plain of Yamato. There it began to intermingle with the existing population, of which in future it made up the top stratum.“, Kamstra 1967: 34/35

From that point of view, a theory about a possible foreign influence on the Japanese archipelago which eventually propelled the birth of the state and its principal head the emperor and his line could not be completely denied.

## RELIGION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE JAPANESE STATE

### Development of the indigenous Japanese religion and its connection with the Imperial House

The complicated processes briefly sketched above eventually led to the consolidation of the tribes into one big entity which could be called a state (for example, Queen Himiko and her Yamatai state could be considered as having been a part of the first efforts toward a unified Japanese state on the archipelago). The gradual stabilization of the new structure inevitably led to the development of a society that to a certain point unified the cultural and ethnological characteristics of the people of which it consisted. One such peculiarity were the cultic beliefs and practices which not only were preserved but later also set the beginning of the Japanese indigenous religion nowadays called Shintô.

Here, one should point out that the indigenous beliefs of the people who populated the Japanese archipelago since times ancient didn't even have a collective name at the time of its beginnings. Some authors such as Nelly Naumann, for example, argue that the term "Shintô" was introduced somewhere in the sixth century after the introduction of Buddhism. Only after that, the indigenous Japanese religion began to be called Shintô ("the way of the gods") in order to be distinguished from Butsudô, "the way of the Buddha".<sup>234</sup> Helen Hardacre maintains the view that the term began to be widely used from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>235</sup> Extensive discussions on the matter are also offered by Japanese scholars such as Kuroda Toshio. He explains that "*It is far from conclusive [...] that the word Shinto was used in early times to denote Japan's indigenous religion.*"<sup>236</sup> In addition to Tsuda Sôkichi's categorization of the meaning of the term "Shintô" in early Japanese literature<sup>237</sup>, Kuroda argues that at the time of the compilation of the mytho-history Nihonshoki (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), "*Shinto could easily refer to the conduct or action of the kami*".<sup>238</sup> The author bases his views on the fact that "*during this period the character dô or tō, which is found in Shinto, meant not so much a road or path but rather conduct or right action.*"<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, Kuroda argues that

"Another possible interpretation of Shinto in the Nihon shoki is Taoism. Based on recent studies, it is clear that Shinto was another term for Taoism in China during the same period. Moreover, as Taoist concepts and practices steadily passed into Japan between the first century A.D. and the period when the Nihon shoki was compiled, they no doubt exerted a

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<sup>234</sup> See Naumann 1988: 137

<sup>235</sup> See Hardacre 2017: 44

<sup>236</sup> See Kuroda 1981: 4

<sup>237</sup> „The intellectual historian Tsuda Sôkichi [...] has divided its meaning into the following categories: 1) "religious beliefs found in indigenous customs passed down in Japan, including superstitious beliefs"; 2) "the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a kami, the status of kami, being a kami, or the kami itself"; 3) concepts and teachings concerning kami; 4) the teachings propagated by a particular shrine; 5) "the way of the kami" as a political or moral norm; and 6) sectarian Shinto as found in new religions.", Tsuda 1949: ch. I. In: Kuroda 1981: 4

<sup>238</sup> Kuroda 1981: 4

<sup>239</sup> Kuroda 1981: 4

considerable influence on the ceremonies and the beliefs of communal groups bound by blood ties or geographical proximity and on those which emerged around imperial authority.”<sup>240</sup>

Following these interpretations, authors such as Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen propose that one should distinguish between kami worship on the one hand, and Shintô on the other hand.

“We propose to set Shinto aside as a various attempts made in different historic practices and beliefs, and to construct a distinct kami realm, parallel to and clearly distinguished from Buddhism.

In making this choice, we are in fact following established usage as practiced (albeit implicitly) in most Japanese academic writing. Here "Shinto" is used almost exclusively in theological context, while historians writing on kami and shrines prefer more neutral terms, such as "kami worship" (jingi sūhai 神祇崇拜) or "shrine rituals" 神社祭祀). Using Shinto in the sense proposed here is also consistent with the history of the term in the Japanese sources, as already pointed out by Kuroda. The term shintô 神道 developed from a simple word meaning "(the realm of) the kami" into a more sophisticated concept meaning "the kami Way" in the course of the medieval period, and evolved into an autonomous ritual system from there.”<sup>241</sup>

As it could be seen, the discussion about the origin of the word “Shintô” and its precise meaning remains unconcluded until modern times.

Nevertheless, a single undeniable fact regarding Shintô is that it never existed as a universal set of beliefs and prayers but rather as a composition of different politico-religious ideas unified under one name.<sup>242</sup> Nelly Naumann explains that it was in much later times when the modern Shintô theology began to differentiate between four different types of Shintô:

“...einen Shintô des Kaiserhauses, Schrein-Shintô, Sekten-Shintô und Volksshintô.”<sup>243</sup>

Among those four Shintô types, it is the „Volksshintô“ (folk Shintô) which could be regarded as the original form of the indigenous beliefs which spread throughout the archipelago since times ancient. According to Naumann,

“Den Volksshintô [...] besteht [...] aus Aberglauben, Magie und zeremoniellen Praktiken des Volkes, die von anderer Seite auch unter der Bezeichnung »Volks glauben« oder »Volksreligion« zusammengefaßt und als eigene Erscheinung behandelt werden.”<sup>244</sup>

In his book “*Essentials of Shintô. An analytical guide to principal teachings*”, Stuart Picken defends the theory that the stone circles found at some places in Japan as well as the old burial methods of the Jômon period were the earliest roots of the Shintôistic tradition.<sup>245</sup> According to that hypothesis, the climatic changes during the Yayoi period inevitably influenced the beliefs of the people, thus making them more susceptible to revering the nature and its numerous manifestations in the form of rain, sun, wind and so on. Picken argues that the word kami which nowadays is used with the meaning of “deity”

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<sup>240</sup> Kuroda 1981: 6. Further on, the author also offers a short list of the many Taoist elements transmitted to Japan.

<sup>241</sup> Teeuwen/Scheid 2002: 199

<sup>242</sup> „Up to that point [*the fifteenth century*], Shinto is a collective designation for jingi, state-sponsored Kami rites, and miscellaneous Kami cults.”, Hardacre 2017: 44

<sup>243</sup> Naumann 1988: ix

<sup>244</sup> Naumann 1988: x

<sup>245</sup> See Picken 1994: 7

could be traced back to the Yayoi period when the contemporary people worshipped the forces of the nature as deities which guarded their life.<sup>246</sup> Later archaeological findings also revealed numerous mountain religious sites from the Kofun period which didn't seem to have had any connection with the burial mounds typical of the epoch. The mirrors found at some of these burial sites indicate a possible reverence for divine forces different from the prevalent religious customs at the time.

In that train of thought, Picken offers a classification of the roots of the Japanese indigenous religion into six groups:

**“Animism.** This belief sees life and divinity in all the phenomena of Nature from lightning to the winds and rain. The ancient Japanese gave these names and called them kami. Animism is simply a way of recognizing and responding to an encompassing sense of life in all its forms. [...]

**Nature Worship.** Closely linked to animism, nature worship is the general Japanese reverence for nature and the origin of shrines in places of great natural beauty. [...]

**Ancestral Reverence.** This is found as in most Asian nations. A late nineteenth-century resident of Japan, Lafcadio Hearn, called it Japan's ultimate religion, meaning that any religion coming into Japan either had to come in terms with it or risk not finding a place in Japanese society. [...]

**Shamanism.** This belief has a long history in Japan. Most probably, the early Empresses were shamanists, a role that is not inconsistent with the kind of power they wielded. [...]

**Agricultural Rites.** These appear in references to the kami of the stars breaking down divisions between rice-fields. [...]

**Lustration.** Bathing in rivers to be rid of pollution has long been associated with Japanese culture. The Chinese Wei Dynasty records noted that the Japanese bathed in rivers after a funeral.”<sup>247</sup>

In previous chapters, an association was made between the animism and the foreign nomadic invaders who supposedly influenced the indigenous Japanese society and contributed to the establishment of the Imperial line. The nature worship was already mentioned in the current chapter. Shamanism with all its characteristics would be discussed in later chapters. According to Picken, two of the other three characteristics (ancestral reverence and agricultural rites) could be dated to the Yayoi period<sup>248</sup>. Later, they became entangled with Buddhism and Confucianism to such a point that it became nearly impossible to describe a certain characteristic as strictly affiliated to only one of these systems of beliefs. For example, the ancestral reverence could be seen in Buddhism, thus revealing an interesting blending between Shintô and Buddhism on Japanese soil in later times. Agricultural rites, on the other hand, are regarded even today as an important part of the ascension of a new emperor on the throne (Daijôsai) and thus a part of the indigenous set of beliefs. Similarly, lustration, albeit in a slightly different form, could be seen nowadays in the traditional national sport sumô where the dohyô is purified with salt before the start of a tournament.

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<sup>246</sup> See Picken 1994: 7

<sup>247</sup> Picken 1994: 9

<sup>248</sup> See Picken 1994: 5

Delving deeper into the origins of the Japanese indigenous religion, Helen Hardacre partly supports Picken's views and argues that the driving force which influenced the creation of certain forms of religious beliefs and rituals was the people's motivation to sustain their life.

"...religious life developed in connection with rice cultivation. One type of Yayoi ritual site centers on large rocks or boulders, some with food containers, wooden fetishes, and such precious objects as jewels. Many such sites were located near springs, waterfalls, and riverbanks or hills and mountains, suggesting a focus on water and its importance to agriculture. It is believed that boundaries were created around ritual sites, and that spirits called Kami were invited to descend into some object, such as a tree, pillar, animal, waterfall, island, or mountain. [...]

The Kami were strongly identified with natural forces governing the crops. Kami were not originally imagined as having anthropomorphic form or as dwelling permanently in a single place. Instead, they were believed to respond to human invitations to manifest. Otherwise, they remained formless and invisible. The Kami's association with natural forces gave them an unpredictable quality. Just as nature can produce floods, drought, and epidemic disease, the Kami were not necessarily always beneficent to humanity. [...] For this reason, worship mainly took the form of beseeching and placating them, or seeking to avoid their anger."<sup>249</sup>

Similar to Stuart Picken, Hardacre also firmly denies the statements expressed by authorities such as W.G. Aston that Shintô doesn't include ancestor worship.<sup>250</sup>

In later studies, both Korean and Chinese scholars defined all things Japanese, Shintô included, as borrowed or even stolen from Korea and China, respectively. The kokugaku scholars led by Motoori Norinaga tried to define which aspects of the Japanese culture were native and which were imported. According to that analysis cited by Picken,

"Among the other things, it was concluded that the basis of Japanese religious thought was the doctrine of Amaterasu, in other words, a solar myth. Japanese culture may well have drawn elements from Northeast Asia, because metalwork – and later Buddhism – came through Korea. [...] Nevertheless, these factors do not preclude the possibility of designating the borrowed items as Japanese, because it was the emerging Japanese culture that integrated them into a worldview that later became part of Japan's cultural identity. The view of life embodied in the Japanese classics, although set forth in Chinese language, is quite different from any other views of life found in Asia."<sup>251</sup>

Nevertheless, Picken argues that it is very difficult to find the boundaries between native and foreign, particularly in matters such as folk religion. All Asian folk religions had certain similarities, such as ancestral worship and shamanism, that make them very hard to define as unique. A clear example of these similarities is offered by Helen Hardacre in her comparison of the narratives of the land-ceding and heavenly descent which could be found in the Japanese mytho-histories Kojiki and Nihonshoki.

"Comparative study has shown that Japanese versions of these tales share a general outline with North Asian and Korean myths: bearing sacred regalia and a mandate from heavenly deities, their descendant, the original ruler, descends to the top of a mountain to take possession of the earth. Those who accompany him on the descent, or who are present to

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<sup>249</sup> Hardacre 2017: 19

<sup>250</sup> See Hardacre 2017: 100

<sup>251</sup> Picken 1994: 11/12

swear fealty upon his arrival, are the divine ancestors of those clans privileged to serve the ruler's descendants in perpetuity."<sup>252</sup>

As it could be seen, such legends are also found in other foreign cultures, but it is the way in which they are narrated that makes them "indigenous" and "Japanese". According to Hardacre, in Kojiki,

"The "indigenous" is constructed through extensive discussion of the Kami and their rites, emphasis on Japanese sovereigns as if they were the only ones in the world, and by expunging the record of contact with other countries and religions."<sup>253</sup>

Anyway, despite the lack of historical evidence of the nature of pre-Buddhist Shintō, it could be assumed that in some aspects the Shintō known today doesn't differ much from the Shintō which existed at the beginning of the Japanese state. For example, that statement can be supported by the fact that the shrines at Ise are still rebuilt every twenty years in exactly the same way as it was done centuries ago. At the same time, however, namely that constancy could be used to prove that even Shintō's earliest forms possessed the characteristics of "*a fully fledged religious system*"<sup>254</sup>.

Anyway, as the Yamato state spread across more territory in the fifth century, it soon became clear that one person alone could not carry the responsibility for both religion and politics. They had to be differentiated, that is, a system had to be created which had to function as a support beam for the emperor. During that period, the contacts with the continent increased and with that also the exchanged technology and knowledge. The most notable gift eventually brought back to the young Japanese state was the so-called "stratification" of the Japanese society.<sup>255</sup> According to the new structure, the Imperial line was situated at the apex of the societal ladder, while the bottom was occupied by farmers or by immigrants from the continent who were often looked down on from the higher-ups. It seems that the stratification of the society also contributed to the formation of certain religious beliefs among the people. According to Picken, the reverence for the deceased clan leaders (uji no kami) set the beginning of the kami worship as, upon their death, they were worshipped as protective deities of the living. The honorary title mikoto, later used in reference to the emperor, probably had its origin there and in later times evolved to the simpler term kami.<sup>256</sup>

Further step in the dividing of the authority of the emperor was the establishment of two modes of control: a ceremonial and a secular one. According to Delmer M. Brown, the ceremonial role was not much different from the function exercised by the local village heads during the Jōmon and Yayoi periods when they were revered as religious leaders of their respective societies.<sup>257</sup> A peculiarity of that period (preserved even in later times) was that the ceremonial function was always performed by a female, hence the later term "fujo" (巫女) which in some cases is also read as "miko". The first ideograph means "shaman", whereas the second "woman" or "female". According to Parac,

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<sup>252</sup> Hardacre 2017: 57

<sup>253</sup> Hardacre 2017: 67/68

<sup>254</sup> Hardacre 2017: 44

<sup>255</sup> "The entire social order was becoming stratified and segmented by (1) lineal groups or clans (uji) that dominated the lands and people of entire regions, (2) occupational groups (be) that served clan chieftains and the kingdom's rulers by performing services and manufacturing tools and weapons, (3) royal estates (miyake) that handed over a large portion of what they produced to the current Yamato king or queen, and (4) provinces (kuni) and districts (agata) that served as arms of Yamato control. The leaders of all these groups held hereditary ranks (kurai) and titles (kabane) that were marks of status determined by proximity to the Yamato ruler.", Brown (a) 1993: 28

<sup>256</sup> See Picken 1994: 13

<sup>257</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 28/29



“It is significant that a general term in the Japanese language for a shamaness is “miko”, while for shamans this specific term does not exist.”<sup>258</sup>

That fact could be seen as evidence that the ceremonial, that is religious, mode of control was predominantly exercised by females, which would underline the superior role of the women in the realm of magic and mystery. On the upper levels of society, that spiritual authority contributed to the reigns of female rulers such as the queens Himiko and Iyo, and partly that of Empress Jingû, who functioned rather as religious than as secular leaders of their societies, but nevertheless were revered as both by their people. The situation at the bottom of the social ladder was not much different. On local scale, it was often believed that the kami would rather choose a pure virgin to possess and thus make contact with the world of the living, which established the young females as the only possible connection with the revered deities.<sup>259</sup> That function of the local shamanesses ensured their central role in the religious life of their people.

On the other hand, the secular mode of control was determined by the authority necessary for the exercising of physical power (in military, economic or political aspect). That was the case with the male co-rulers of Himiko or Iyo, or, in the case of Jingû, with the young Emperor Ôjin for whom she functioned as regent. During the Yamato period, the secular mode of control gradually replaced the religious mode of control as the main form of authority within the bounds of society. It reached its peak in the fifth-century reign of Emperor Nintoku who could be considered as one of the best representatives of the secular mode of control.<sup>260</sup> Even then, however, he and his successors did not rely only on the physical authority to support their reign. As Brown points out,

“Even though their military power, material wealth, and political control were spectacular, they still used proportionately large amounts of material and labor to build huge mounds for the burial of deceased predecessors, paid close attention to rites performed at shrines in their hegemonic spheres, and associated themselves with making or revising myths that would sanctify a kami hierarchy headed by their own ancestral kami. Such activity leaves little doubt that the Yamato kings and queens were attempting to sanctify their positions as hereditary agents of the country's most powerful kami.”<sup>261</sup>

Thus, by abiding to the religious customs and rites, the emperors of the later Kofun and the Asuka periods did manage to combine religious and secular mode of control. Through the building of huge burial mounds, the emperors used religion as a proof of their life and achievements which ought to be remembered by their successors. Thus, the role of religion slightly changed from that which could be seen in the Yayoi period, for example. Nevertheless, the religious beliefs continued to be an important component of the young Japanese society. Especially on local level, the shamanesses remained the only ones who could successfully communicate with the deities' realm. At the same time, while these processes took place on Japanese soil, a certain set of beliefs spread further throughout the continent. Its name was Buddhism and it was only a matter of time before it reached the young Yamato state. The new teaching's arrival on Japanese soil marked the beginning of a new era in Japanese history, the Asuka period (538 – 710). Having once reached Yamato, Buddhism could only adapt to the society and the political system of the state or be set up to fail. The long process from the arrival of the teaching of Buddha in Japan up until its eventual assimilation as religious and, somehow political, doctrine could be divided into three phases:

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<sup>258</sup> Parać 2015: 147

<sup>259</sup> See Parać 2015: 152

<sup>260</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 29

<sup>261</sup> Brown (a) 1993: 29

- “1) The arrival of Buddhism in Japan,
- 2) The adaptation to personal and Japanese Buddhism, and finally
- 3) The origination of state Buddhism.”<sup>262</sup>

## Introduction of Buddhism and its development into Japanese Buddhism

### Introduction of Buddhism: Theories and controversies

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that the contacts between the young Japanese state and the continent (especially the Korean kingdoms Silla and Paekche) increased during the fifth century. To a certain point, it would not be wrong to say that the exchange was caused by the territorial aspirations of the two, or for that matter three, parties. On the one hand, there were the kingdoms Koguryô, Paekche and Silla which led continuous war with one another, on the other hand, there was the Japanese ruler who also had his ambitions for continental expansion.<sup>263</sup> Under such political circumstances, it is not difficult to understand the reason for the huge waves of Korean immigrants (called *kikaijin* in Yamato) which reached the Japanese shores in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Later on, many of these people became indispensable to fostering arts, crafts and learning, and thus contributed to the rapid change of the Yamato state during the Asuka and Nara periods. One such case was that of the scholars Ajikki and Wang'in who supposedly introduced the first Chinese classical works into Japan.<sup>264</sup> Another case was that of the immigrants from Paekche who reached Yamato as early as 522 and for whom it is believed that they played a major role in the introduction of Buddhism in Japan. In their majority they belonged to the clan of saddlers and were led by a certain Shiba Tattô. Controversial figure himself<sup>265</sup>, Shiba Tattô was supposedly a Korean immigrant of Chinese origin.<sup>266</sup> It could, therefore, be assumed that the immigrant population in Yamato was in no way homogeneous. Despite having come from the Korean peninsula, not all of these people were Koreans. There could also have been Chinese or Koreans of Chinese descent among them. Anyway, after its arrival in Yamato, the group of saddlers was given its own district there – Takaichi, nowadays in Nara Prefecture.<sup>267</sup> The geographical position of the territory ensured the relative freedom of its people to continue living their life as they had done in their home country.<sup>268</sup> Considering *Nihonshoki's* reports on the matter, it seems that religion was among the aspects which remained unaffected by the immigrants' arrival in their new home. Emperor Bidatsu's chronicle even narrates that in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of that ruler's reign (584) Shiba Tattô, among others, began to actively spread his Buddhist religion on Japanese soil and

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<sup>262</sup> Kamstra 1967: 224

<sup>263</sup> For more information on the matter see Kim, Jinwung, *A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict*; Barnes, Gina Lee, *State Formation in Korea: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*; Lee, Chong-sik, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension*; Atkins, E. Taylor, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945*; Lewin, Bruno, *Aya und Hata: Bevölkerungsgruppen Altjapans kontinentaler Herkunft*

<sup>264</sup> See Yu 2012: 61

<sup>265</sup> „His name is clearly a misreading of the Chinese-style name "Sima Da and others" (Ch., deng 4; J: -to or -ra); and, if such a person ever really existed, he is as likely to have arrived in Japan in 582 as in 522.", Holcombe 1999: 289

<sup>266</sup> According to Lewin, he could have belonged either to the Aya or the Hata tribe. The name Yamato no Aya described the Han Chinese who were related to the saddlers and immigrants from Korea. The Hata on the other hand were the Ch'in Chinese emigrants from Korea., For more information see Lewin 1962: 221

<sup>267</sup> See Miyata 2012: 60

<sup>268</sup> The sitting emperor at the time, Keitai, gravitated on the line Kyôto-Ôsaka, thus always staying close to the Takaichi district where Shiba Tattô and his people dueled., See *Nihonshoki*, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896, Keidai Tennô

thus “the beginning of Buddhism” was set.<sup>269</sup> However, Jacques Kamstra finds the said narrative utterly controversial. Based on the phrase “at that time” (此時) which could be found twice in the original narrative, he comes to the conclusion that the phrase could have been used as a means to bind together various tales, rather than a particle to narrate events which occurred one after another. Thus, it is highly probable that the Nihonshoki chronicle from the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 13<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Bidatsu’s reign (584) consists not of one whole story, but rather of three separate stories pieced together that took place over a long period of time.<sup>270</sup> From that point of view, “the beginning of Buddhism” could not have taken place in 584. On the other hand, another Nihonshoki chronicle from the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Emperor Suiko (606, r. 592 – 628) mentions Shiba Tattô and his family in relation to the establishment of Buddhist monastic life in Japan.<sup>271</sup> Based on all those facts, it could be concluded that Shiba Tattô contributed immensely to the introduction and further development of Buddhism on Japanese soil.

All things considered, even if one could only speculate about Shiba Tattô’s existence or his actual role in the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, it is an undeniable fact that the contacts with the continent contributed, mostly politically, to the proliferation of the foreign religion on Japanese soil. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Korean peninsula had already turned into a battleground between the kingdoms Paekche, Silla and Koguryô. Due to various factors, however, it was difficult for any one of them to achieve a decisive victory over its opponents. For that reason, it was often the case that the rulers of these kingdoms sought the help of their neighboring countries: either China or Yamato.<sup>272</sup> According to Nihonshoki’s report, such seemed to have been the case in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Emperor Kinmei (545, r. 539 – 571) when the king of Paekche sent an embassy to Yamato in order to beg for reinforcements against the enemy kingdom of Silla. As a sign of respect, “*an image of the Buddha sixteen feet high (the traditional dimensions) and [...] a written prayer...*”<sup>273</sup> could be found among the tributes. According to Nihonshoki, the religious gifts from Paekche didn’t stop with the Buddha image and the prayer from 545. In the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Kinmei’s reign, another embassy was sent to Yamato and the Korean emissaries brought with them presents in the form of “*...an image of Shaka Butsu in gold and copper, several flags and umbrellas, and a number of volumes of “Sutras”*”. Separately he presented a memorial in which he lauded the merit of diffusing abroad religious worship, ...”<sup>274</sup> From these reports, it could be concluded that the role of Shiba Tattô for the dissemination of Buddhism in the young Yamato state was simply one theory among many others in regard to the spread of Buddha’s teaching on Japanese soil. Depending on that which opinion one decides to believe in, the year in which the foreign religion was brought to Japan also changes: it varies within the vast span of roughly 60 years between 522 and 584.<sup>275</sup>

## The birth of Japanese Buddhism

### Import of Buddhism and internal struggles

Anyway, similar to all other innovations in different areas of life and from different times, Buddhism was also not welcomed with open arms into the religious and political life of the Yamato state. During the reigns of Kinmei’s successors (up to Emperor Yômei who reigned for the short span of two years:

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<sup>269</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 101/102

<sup>270</sup> See Kamstra 1967: 250

<sup>271</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 134

<sup>272</sup> For more information see Kim, Jinwung, A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict; Barnes, Gina Lee, State Formation in Korea: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives

<sup>273</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 59

<sup>274</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 66

<sup>275</sup> See Freiburger/Kleine 2015: 147

from 585 to 587), there were constant political quarrels and even military conflicts between pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist or, for that matter pro-Shintôist, families. The former party's strongest pillar of support was the Soga clan, while the latter was represented by the trio Ôtomo – Mononobe – Nakatomi. There were many indications that the reason for the conflicts between pro- and anti-Buddhists should not be sought on ideologico-religious but rather on political level. As Soga's territory shared borders with the Korean immigrants<sup>276</sup>, they had ample opportunities to become intimately acquainted with the assets of the Korean and Chinese culture and to open their eyes for the political benefits to be obtained if they adopted the new foreign religion. On the other hand, clans as Mononobe and Nakatomi, the territories of which didn't share a border with the immigrants' lands, didn't have a chance to become acquainted with the innovations brought by the foreigners. Moreover, they belonged to the so-called old uji (old clans) which claimed godly descent such as that of the emperor himself and served the sovereign in the capacity as advisers and councilors. From that point of view, they regarded the foreign religion as an immediate threat to their own authority and power:

“To the ruling families of Yamato who based their political authority in important part upon their claim of descent from the kami native to the Japanese islands, Buddhism presented a real and even frightening threat. The possibility of its contribution to a more stable political hierarchy was not easily seen. For if it was, as it claimed, a religious power superior to all local powers, then what was to become of the religious authority claimed by the various uji chiefs or by the mikoto? Once the authority of the Shinto kami was challenged, then the foundation of uji society could be threatened.”<sup>277</sup>

The political quarrels between pro- and anti-Buddhists necessitated certain measures to be instituted by the rulers of the state if they wanted to retain their authority and to be able to control both religious teachings and by extension also their supporters. In that train of thought, it should probably be explained why such measures were even needed. According to the stratification of the Yamato society, the emperor functioned not only as the leader (uji no kami) of the most powerful family (uji) in the land but he was also the high priest of the indigenous religion Shintô.<sup>278</sup> Similar to the case of the old noble clans such as Mononobe or Nakatomi, who felt threatened by the knowledge which Buddhism introduced, the sovereign regarded the potential situation in which the new religion linked hands with powerful noble families such as Soga as a threat to his own political and religious superiority. Therefore, the first ruler who tried to evade such danger was Emperor Kinmei (r. 539 – 571). Two of his wives were from the powerful Soga clan the members of which also happened to be ardent supporters of Buddhism.<sup>279</sup> Thus, in accepting Soga daughters into the Imperial family, the emperor strived to bind the new religious teaching to the Imperial House and to put it under the sovereign's direct control. Through the marriages with Buddhist wives, Kinmei tried to defend his position as high priest of Shintô against the new religion. In reality, however, it was namely those marriages which opened the door for Buddhism to enter the Imperial House and to change it from within – one of his Soga wives, Kitashihime became mother of the future emperors Yômei and Suiko, while his other Soga wife, Oane-hime, was the mother of Emperor Sushun. Acquainted with both Buddhism and the ujigami beliefs from an early age, these future rulers stood before a challenge even before their ascension to the throne: they had to learn to understand both religious teachings and, after their enthronement, to strive to become a bridge between them.

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<sup>276</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 147

<sup>277</sup> Hall 2008: 53

<sup>278</sup> See Brown (a) 1993: 28; Kamstra 1967: 72/141

<sup>279</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 40

The accommodation of both religious beliefs, however, was not an easy task. Although Shintô was not as clearly defined a religion, Kuroda Toshio even goes as far as to argue that the concept of Shintô as a religious system is nothing more than a theological fabrication<sup>280</sup>, as Buddhism, its beliefs and traditions were deeply rooted in the Yamato society. In the previous chapter, it became clear that the system of indigenous beliefs served not only as a religious but also as a political pillar of the society. At the same time, however, it was also discussed that in contrast to other religious doctrines, Shintô didn't offer a set of moral codes according to which a person should handle<sup>281</sup>. That reality was probably why it didn't try, or more precisely wasn't able, to mold the society or the political system of the land according to its own teachings. Instead, as it would be discussed later, it was utilized and modified to serve the agenda of powerful political figures (either courtiers or, as was very often the case, emperors). Moreover, as it was already explained in the previous chapter, despite the importance of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu for the Japanese indigenous religion, the deity wasn't revered in the same sense in which Jesus is worshipped in Christianity, for example.<sup>282</sup> As every town, village, or even every single family revered a different deity as its protector (ujigami)<sup>283</sup>, Amaterasu, as the protector deity and also ancestor of the Imperial family, was considered as only one kami among many others revered in the country. This lack of clearly defined pantheon probably left its imprint on the Shintôistic clergy life. Although the emperor was revered not only as the leader of the most powerful uji in the land and, by extension, as the secular leader of the Yamato state but also as the main priest of Shintô, there was no clear religious stratification beneath him. Nuns and priests as they could be seen in Buddhism, for example, were vague figures not clearly defined in Shintô. Of course, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, on local level there were women who served as miko, or priestesses, and conveyed the messages between the worlds of the living and the deities, but they were not classified depending on their importance, the deity which they served, or the size of their congregations.<sup>284</sup> Such a concept was hardly acceptable since every single kami was revered as equally important to all the others, thus denying the idea of godly pantheon on the model of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome.

On the other end of the axis stood Buddhism, a religion opposite to Shintô in regard to the said characteristics. As it was mentioned, despite the different theories concerning the exact year of its import and the circumstances under which the foreign teaching found its way into the Yamato state, it was an undeniable fact that Buddhism reached the Japanese coast through the island country's contacts with the continent, the Korean states in particular. Here, it should be noted that the Korean

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<sup>280</sup> Extensive discussions on that matter could be read in Kuroda Toshio's essay "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion", as well as in Mark Teeuwen and Bernhard Scheid's editors' introduction to "Tracing Shinto in the History of Kami Worship".

<sup>281</sup> See Naumann 1988: x

<sup>282</sup> On that matter, Teeuwen and Scheid explain that "The term "Shinto", however – when understood as a singular "kami Way" – by definition suggests an integrated religion, along the lines of, say, Buddhism or Christianity, and thus goads us into ignoring the inherent diversity of Japanese kami worship.", See Teeuwen/Scheid 2002: 199

<sup>283</sup> See Picken 1993: 13/14

<sup>284</sup> „Japanese shamanesses are divided in two groups. The first group is called kan-nagi where miko belongs, and it is associated with Shinto shrines. These shamanesses perform many functions only in certain formal Shinto ceremonies and they lost most of their former functions and techniques. The second group is called kuchiyose and these are shamanesses who are associated with rural areas. They usually live in a certain village or they migrate from one village to another, according to the needs of their residents. They preserved the so-called ancient shamanistic techniques such as sooth saying, trance, communication with the deities and the dead. Shamanesses from the first group are known under the name miko or jinja-miko ("shamans of Shinto shrines"), and the ones from the second group are known under the name ichiko or sato-miko ("city or village shamans"). Shamanesses of these two categories are semi-institutionalized figures: jinja-miko is usually selected from a family in which Shinto traditions are hereditary, while sato-miko becomes a shamaness through certain initiatory trials and trainings under the guidance of their masters.", Parać 2015: 153/154

Buddhism was nothing more and nothing less than “*eine Variante des chinesischen Mahâyâna*”<sup>285</sup>-*Buddhismus*”.<sup>286</sup> Since its appearance in China (supposedly somewhen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.<sup>287</sup>), the teaching of Buddha undertook severe changes. It had to compete firstly with the Chinese state ideology, the Confucianism, and then with Taoism. Eventually, Buddhism had to change itself in order to be able to adapt itself and to survive – simply said, it had to sinicize itself. Firstly, the Buddhist scriptures had to be adapted into Chinese, later on Buddhist institutions were established.<sup>288</sup> Such sinicized Buddhism reached the Korean peninsula in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>289</sup> There, the Buddhist monks were regarded as “*wundermächtige Heiler [...], die wirksame Rituale auszuführen verstanden und zugleich wichtige Kulturtechniken wie Kalligraphie, Kunsthandwerk, Architektur, Medizin, Kalenderkunde und dergleichen mehr beherrschten.*”<sup>290</sup> More important, however, was the fact that the kings of the three Korean kingdoms on the peninsula tried to utilize the new religion for their own political purposes.<sup>291</sup> Thus, the sinicized Buddhism was further koreanized and as such reached the Japanese coast somewhen in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Despite its initially small number of supporters (the immigrants and then the Soga), Buddhism had its clear ideology, its vast religious and secular (for that matter also political) knowledge, its scriptures and its know-how in institutional matters to rely on. From that point of view, it presented a real danger for Shintô and, by extension, for the emperor who acted as the main priest of the indigenous religion. In light of the said circumstances, the task of the sovereign after the import of Buddhism was to find a new source of religious authority different from the reliance on the power of one or another deity.

As it was mentioned, the first ruler to make steps toward the amalgamation of Buddhism and the Japanese indigenous beliefs was Kinmei who tried not only to remain true to his role of main priest of Shintô but also to put Buddhism and its vast powerbase under his direct control. His son and successor on the throne, Emperor Bidatsu (r. 572 – 585) showed his willingness to continue that policy. In his Nihonshoki chronicle one reads that “*The Emperor was not a believer in Buddhism, but was fond of literature.*”<sup>292</sup> A sentence in such a firm tone gives the reader an idea of Bidatsu’s attitude toward the new religion. Despite being no Buddhist himself, the sovereign was ready to accept the existence of Buddha’s teaching and to make use of the vast knowledge which the Buddhists in the land possessed. Despite Bidatsu’s initial intention, however, there are certain indications that his feelings toward the foreign religion took turn for the worse after his marriage to his half sister Princess Nukatabe, later to be known as Emperor Suiko, in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (576). In his last years, the emperor didn’t visit the empress as often as before. A potential reason for that could be that her court laid in Soga territory in Toyora<sup>293</sup>. The said palace was not far away from the saddlers’ territory and, from Bidatsu’s point of

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<sup>285</sup> In their book „Buddhismus: Handbuch und kritische Einführung“, Oliver Freiberger and Christoph Kleine describe Mahâyâna as follows:

„Vermutlich um den Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung begann eine Bewegung, die sich selbst als >>Mahâyâna<<, >>großes Fahrzeug<<, bezeichnete und ein neues Ideal formulierte: die Buddhaschaft. Man gelobte, als Bodhisattva unzählige Existenzen zu durchleben und dabei aus Mitgefühl allen Wesen zu helfen.“, Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 48

<sup>286</sup> Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 141

<sup>287</sup> See Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 113

<sup>288</sup> See Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 116/136

<sup>289</sup> See Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 141

<sup>290</sup> Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 141

<sup>291</sup> „...Buddhismus, der [...] die weltliche Herrschaft der Könige religiös legitimierte. Wôn’gwang (-630), der mit seinen >>fünf Geboten<< [...] verlangte, jeder Untertan solle (1) dem Herrscher treu dienen, (2) seinen Eltern treu dienen, (3) Freunden gegenüber aufrichtig sein, (4) niemals vom Schlachtfeld desertieren und (5) keine Lebewesen willkürlich töten.“, Freiberger/Kleine 2015: 142

<sup>292</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 90

<sup>293</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 121; Kamstra 1967: 323

view, that could have been considered Buddhism's attempt to invade his own family. As a matter of fact, Princess Nukatabe's devotion should not have been unexpected. As it was already mentioned, her mother was member of the Soga clan, which meant that the Princess became acquainted with Buddhism from an early age. Be that as it may, according to Nihonshoki's chronicle from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of 14<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (585 A.D.), Bidatsu eventually let his negative sentiments toward Buddhism become publicly known.

"3rd month, 1st day. Mononobe no Yugehi no Moriya no Ohomuraji and Nakatomi no Katsumi no Daibu addressed the Emperor, saying: —"Why hast thou not consented to follow thy servants' counsel? Is not the prevalence of pestilence from the reign of the late Emperor thy father down to thine, so that the nation is in danger of extinction, owin absolutely to the establishment of the exercise of the Buddhist religion by Soga no Omi?" The Emperor gave command, saying: —"Manifestly so: let Buddhism be discontinued."<sup>294</sup>

From that dialogue, it could be assumed that the emperor considered the Buddhist ideas and ideology as dangerous for the nation as a pestilence. Here, it could even be speculated that the ruler wanted to kill two birds with one stone: by prohibiting Buddhism he would have ensured his own authority as main priest of the indigenous religion on the one hand, and also weakened the positions of the powerful Soga family who used the foreign teaching as a supporting beam for their political power on the other hand.

Nevertheless, the amalgamation of Shintô and Buddhism which began during Kinmei's reign and was nearly destroyed during Bidatsu's rule was continued by the deceased emperor's successor Yômei. He was Bidatsu's half brother and Kinmei's son from one of his Soga wives, Kitashi-hime.<sup>295</sup> Similar to his sister, Princess Nukatabe, he was strongly influenced by his mother's beliefs and became acquainted with Buddhism from an early age. Therefore, it should be no wonder that in his Nihonshoki chronicle one reads that "*The Emperor believed in the Law of Buddha and revered the Way of the Gods.*"<sup>296</sup> Although he reigned for only two years (585 – 587), he made it explicitly clear that he would strive to remain true both to his duty as high priest of Shintô and to his own religious preferences. Yômei began his reign with the proclamation of an Imperial decree for the appointment of a princess as a high priestess in Ise.<sup>297</sup> He was the first sixth-century emperor to do so. Therefore, it could be assumed that the sovereign's adherence to Buddhism didn't prevent him from acting as high priest of the ujigami belief and as unifier of the nation. On the contrary, both ideologies meant much to him and he tried to take the best out of them and apply it in order to unify the people and the opposing political parties at court. Another proof of Yômei's respect for the indigenous religion of Yamato could be seen in a chronicle from the 4<sup>th</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his reign:

"2nd year, Spring, 4th month, 2nd day. The Emperor performed the ceremony of tasting the new rice on the river-bank of Ihare."<sup>298</sup>

That ceremony was niiname: the tasting of the new harvest, and was originally connected with the Japanese indigenous beliefs<sup>299</sup>. Thus, the emperor, as main actor in the ceremony, honored not only

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<sup>294</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 102/103

<sup>295</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 106

<sup>296</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 106

<sup>297</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 106/107

<sup>298</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 109

<sup>299</sup> According to Kamstra,

"Originally it had something to do with the descent of the divinity into the harvest community. It was considered a cult repetition of the sacrifice which Ama-waka hiko, 天稚彦, brought to Amaterasu after

the harvest and the efforts of his people but also the indigenous beliefs of the land together with the whole pantheon of deities, be they small or big. In the end, despite his will to always act as the bridge between Buddhism and Shintô, the emperor decided to act according to his own preferences shortly before his death. On his deathbed, the ruler of the state declared that he wanted to accept the Three Treasures and to become a Buddhist.<sup>300</sup> Before officially doing so, however, the sovereign decided to seek the advice of his ministers. That only added fuel to the fire, as the Nakatomi and Mononobe teamed up against Soga. The conflict became even more fierce after the emperor's death. The court officials couldn't decide upon a successor and it was only natural for Soga and Mononobe to be at the two opposing ends of the dispute. Eventually, the only solution to the problem was an armed confrontation. Soga no Umako supported by Prince Umayado, the son of the deceased sovereign and his Soga empress, eventually won against Mononobe, and their leader Moriya was killed.<sup>301</sup> As history showed, the victory not only cleared Soga's path to political domination but also set the stable base for Buddhism's transformation into Japanese Buddhism.

To sum up, Yômei was the first emperor who used Buddhism as a means to strengthen his own authority and political power. He encouraged the establishment of a Buddhist clergy in land<sup>302</sup> – a strategy devised to stabilize Buddhism and to put it on an equal footing with Shintô. The goal of the emperor had probably been a steadier dissemination of the foreign faith in the state, a deed which could have been achieved only through a firmly established clergy in the land. Such a strengthening of Buddhism would have been beneficial to the emperor himself. If the newly imported religion stood on an equal footing with Shintô, then there would have been no internal struggles at court between the adherents to the one or the other religious belief. Moreover, there would have been fewer chances for a family to utilize religion as a means of political empowerment and thus to endanger the authority of the emperor. On the other hand, by showing that he supported Buddhism and thought about its further dissemination in the land, and by being almost as considerate toward it as toward Shintô, Yômei probably wanted to show that a religion could and should be accepted in Yamato so long as the emperor himself allowed it. By accepting Buddhism shortly before his death, he further stressed his thoughts that only the sovereign as *uji no kami* of the whole nation should and would manage all religions in the land. Such a stance meant that all religions and their followers in the state were under the jurisdiction of the emperor, and that all religious beliefs were indigenous to Yamato in a manner similar to the way in which all people on Japanese soil were considered subjects of the sovereign. To further emphasize his position, Yômei encouraged both the reverence for Shintô as well as that toward Buddhism<sup>303</sup>. This practice became something customary for all emperors after him. Even though many of Yômei's successors were Buddhists, or became such later on during their reigns, they never forgot their function as *uji no kami* and high priests of Shintô.

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her grandson had descended to earth to found the Japanese realm. Not only as a harvest festival but also as an enthronement feast of the emperor this celebration had a special lustre. On this occasion the emperor clothed himself in a room especially reserved for this within the palace, the *Iwaido*, 齋戸, hall, with the old ritual robe, the *matoko ou no fusuma*, 真床覆衾 which means 'blanket of the true bed'. It was believed that this robe was the real seat of the divine holiness. [...] It was believed that in this *matoko ou no fusuma* the *musubi* dwelt which united the new emperor with the partite soul of Amaterasu. By clothing himself in it, the divine power penetrated to him. Thus the actual heaven of Amaterasu became tangible here on earth and concrete in the emperor thus clothed in this robe.", Kamstra 1967: 354/355

<sup>300</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 109

<sup>301</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 115

<sup>302</sup> It was during Yômei's reign when Shiba Tattô's son became the first Buddhist monk in Japan, thus setting the beginning of the male Buddhist clergy in the country., See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 134

<sup>303</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 106, 118



Further development in the process of the utilization of Buddhism and “Japanizing” it could be seen during the reign of Emperor Suiko, the first female ruler of Japan. As the circumstances behind her ascension in 592 had been very unique<sup>304</sup>, she used Buddhism as a means to strengthen her own position and authority. Immediately upon her enthronement, Suiko elevated Prince Umayado, son of Emperor Yōmei and a Soga mother and therefore her nephew, to the position of regent (sesshō) and Crown Prince.<sup>305</sup> Despite the controversial description of the Prince’s (better known by his posthumous name Shōtoku Taishi), and for that matter Soga no Umako’s, political role during Emperor Suiko’s reign<sup>306</sup>, it should be noted that many sources, old and new, described him as a scholar, warrior and statesman at once. Although the modern historians have their doubts in regard to the existence of a historical figure called Shōtoku Taishi<sup>307</sup>, it is generally accepted that the Prince’s most notable achievement was the compilation of the Seventeen-Article Constitution which was based on Confucian principles and which represented a set of moral sanctions and administrative structures, and was later considered the model to which all future laws adhered.<sup>308</sup> But the Prince’s first and foremost concern was the nurturing of Buddhism and its establishment as a state religion. In its endeavors, the Prince was wholeheartedly supported by his aunt, Emperor Suiko. She wanted to establish her position as a ruler and the highest authority in the state and chose the religion with which she had grown up as her main pillar of support. Therefore, in 606, the emperor ordered the Crown Prince to make the public lectures on the Buddhist sutras “The Lion Roar of Queen Shrimala” (“Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra”), “Lotus Sutra” (“Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra”)<sup>309</sup>, and “Vimalakīrti Sutra”<sup>310</sup>. Considering the religio-political struggles between Soga and Mononobe several years prior Suiko’s ascension and the emperor’s position as the first female ruler of the Yamato state, one could ask why she chose a delicate matter such as the support of Buddhism as a tool to stabilize her own authority. It could be speculated that her considerations went in a direction similar to that of Emperor Yōmei: “If the influence of Shintō and Buddhism were equal, then there would be no danger for my own authority as the most powerful uji no kami.” Anyway, while the considerations in regard to Emperor Suiko’s ardent support of the foreign religion more or less remain in the sphere of the speculation, it is an undeniable fact that during her reign she encouraged both Soga no Umako and Shōtoku Taishi to build temples. According to Nihonshoki, in the 31<sup>st</sup> year of Suiko’s reign (623), there were 46 temples, 816 priests, and 569 nuns in the state.<sup>311</sup> In the same year, the emperor established the positions of “*Sōjō and a Sōdzu for the superintendence of the priests and nuns.*”<sup>312</sup>, thus setting the beginning of the so-called “Sangha office” (sōgō, 僧綱) and effectively putting the Buddhist clergy in the country under Imperial control.<sup>313</sup> The reason for such a measure was seemingly trivial: a priest who attacked his grandfather with an axe, but behind it probably hid the same ambition as that of Emperor Yōmei. Suiko wanted to put Buddhism under Imperial control and to incorporate it into the sovereign’s authority and power. For that purpose, another ideology was put into use only for it to leave its permanent imprint on both Shintō and Buddhism: Confucianism.

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<sup>304</sup> Umako killed her predecessor Sushun because of the personal grudge between them., See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 119

<sup>305</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 122

<sup>306</sup> See Takagi 2018: 44; Jackson 1999: 373; Hiraizumi 1997: 57/58; Lee 2007: 1; Soper 1967: 198

<sup>307</sup> For more information see Lee 2007: 31/43; Yoshida (b) 2005: 146; Kume 1988

<sup>308</sup> See Naumann 1988: 46

<sup>309</sup> See Lepekhova 2016: 54/55

<sup>310</sup> See Ambros 2015: 46

<sup>311</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 154

<sup>312</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 153

<sup>313</sup> See Kleine 2011: 8

As it was briefly mentioned, Emperor Suiko's regent Shôtoku Taishi remained in history as not only a strong supporter of Buddhism but also a very smart politician and a model scholar. It could be said that the Prince reached the apogee of his political and ideological prowess with the composition of the Seventeen-Article Constitution from 604.<sup>314</sup> Confucian in its nature, it not only supported a centralized government and the strengthening of the emperor's authority<sup>315</sup> but also paid special attention to Buddhism, which could be considered an important step in the acceptance of the teaching of Buddha as an equal to the indigenous religion of the people. The fact that Buddhism was mentioned in Article 2 of his Constitution shows how important it was for both Shôtoku Taishi and Emperor Suiko to achieve religious and political stability in the country by officially recognizing and accepting the new religion.

“二日、篤敬三寶。々々者佛法僧也。則四生之終歸、萬國之禁宗。何世何人、非貴是法。人鮮尤惡。能教從之。其不歸三寶、何以直枉。”<sup>316</sup>

*“II. Sincerely reverence the three treasures. The three treasures, viz. Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood, are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries. What man in what age can fail to reverence this law? Few men are utterly bad. They may be taught to follow it. But if they do not betake them to the three treasures, wherewithal shall their crookedness be made straight?”<sup>317</sup>*

Thus, Buddhism's way for its official recognition as a state religion was paved. In opening the door for the teaching of Buddha, however, Emperor Suiko and Shôtoku Taishi helped Confucianism to also leave its imprint on Shintô, which made the indigenous beliefs of the people more accepting of new ideas and structures. According to Langdon Warner,

“Confucianism, utilitarian above all, had as its main object the teaching of everyone, from the Emperor to the least important subject, what must be practiced that order and peace may permeate the well-governed state,” and its foundation was ceremonial and ancestor worship. Superimposed on Shintoism, it caused a change in the old cult [...]. “In a word, Shintoism formed the base and reason of Japanese morals, while Confucianism enumerated and explained the duties incumbent on each individual.”<sup>318</sup>

To sum up, during Emperor Suiko's reign Shintô, Buddhism and Confucianism began to intertwine to form what would later be called Japanese Buddhism. The strong moral norms of Confucianism created the solid ground for Shintô and Buddhism to find a point of contact. Although it could easily be assumed that Shintô, with its lack of clear ideology or monastic life, would easily be “devoured” by Buddhism, it was, in fact, the Japanese indigenous religion that partly “devoured” Buddhism and made it its own. To be precise, however, the unification of the two religions had actually little to do with one religious belief assimilating the other, it was more of taking the best points of both religions and

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<sup>314</sup> See Waida 1976: 331/332

<sup>315</sup> His views on the matter could be seen in Article 3 of his Constitution (see Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 129) which was strongly influenced by the Chinese theory of sovereignty according to which:

“...rulership derives from Heaven, symbolizing the natural, moral order. The ruler, as Son of Heaven, established this model for men through his ordering of the ritual and regulating of his own conduct. The ruler established clear standards and a universal pattern for his subjects to follow and be nourished by, as the world of nature followed the sun and its seasons, giving life to all things according to their natures.”, Lee 2007: 32

<sup>316</sup> 日本書紀 [Nihonshoki], Chapter 22, 豊御食炊屋姫天皇 推古天皇 [Toyomikeshikiya-hime-tennô Suiko-tennô] 20<sup>th</sup> year

<sup>317</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 129

<sup>318</sup> Warner 1923: 19

creating a whole new ideology. Having said that, after the initial struggles between Soga and Mononobe which had rather political than religious character and Budatsu's antagonism toward the new ideology, Buddhism found a stable footing during the reigns of Yōmei and Suiko. The scholarly-oriented Crown Prince of Emperor Suiko was the one who laid the foundation of Japanese Buddhism as he tried to create a Japanese state with the Chinese governmental structure and bureaucratic system as its model. As the Chinese state was formed according to Confucian norms, these moral codes also entered Yamato to never leave it again. Confucianism with its strong principles and regulations made it possible for Shintō and Buddhism to find their common features and eventually to absorb their respective strong points. The emperors after Suiko had to build on those achievements and to bring the already started development to its end.

Be that as it may, further development of Buddhism's position in the state occurred no sooner than the reign of Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645 – 654). Immediately after his enthronement, he showed his clear preference for Buddha's teaching and his desire to make it the new state religion. That much could be assumed upon reading the Nihonshoki report that "*He honoured the religion of Buddha and despised the Way of the Gods [as is instanced by his cutting down the trees of the shrine of Iku-kuni-dama].*"<sup>319</sup> Moreover, following the model of the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618 – 907), he installed ten scholarly monks as heads of the Sangha.<sup>320</sup> In 650, the emperor went as far as to commission the carving of one thousand images of Buddha.<sup>321</sup> As it could be seen, Emperor Kōtoku represented the other extreme in regard to Buddhism. While Emperor Bidatsu antagonized the new religion and declared his intention to prohibit it, Emperor Kōtoku showed his clear preferences for Buddha's teaching and even "despised" the indigenous beliefs of the people. He obviously didn't learn from his predecessors Yōmei and Suiko who showed that balance between Shintō and Buddhism was needed in order for the country to be able to prosper.

Such was not the case, however, with Emperor Tenmu (r. 673 – 686). According to both Teeuwen and Kuroda, his reign marks the beginning of the so-called shinbutsu shūgō (神仏習合), a term which can be explained as an amalgamation of Shintō (or, kami worship) and Buddhism.<sup>322</sup> His reign was marked by droughts and natural disasters which often made the sovereign seek the support of supernatural powers in an attempt to appease the deities and to put an end to these crises.

"In the summer of 676 (6<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> months), priests and nuns were invited to offer supplications to the Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood (the so-called Three Precious Things); captured and caged animals were ordered to be released (a meritorious practice based on the Buddha's prohibition of taking life); punishments were mitigated, criminals pardoned, the gods of Heaven and Earth prayed to; and a Great Purification (more Daoist than anything else) was held, involving district officials "throughout the realm"."<sup>323</sup>

Here, it could be seen that Tenmu utilized Taoist ceremonies along with Shintōist and Buddhist ones. The reason for that is probably hidden in the circumstances around his ascension to the throne. As a result of political tensions between Emperor Tenji (r. 668 – 671) and the then-Prince Ôama (the future Emperor Tenmu) in regard to the throne succession<sup>324</sup>, the latter decided to shave his head and to

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<sup>319</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 195

<sup>320</sup> See Kleine 2011: 9

<sup>321</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 240

<sup>322</sup> See Kuroda 1981: 9; Breen/Teeuwen 2013: 95

<sup>323</sup> Ooms 2016: 89

<sup>324</sup> See Ooms 2016: 50

become a Buddhist monk in 671.<sup>325</sup> To show his sincerity and his firm will to stay away from politics, he even left the capital and went to Yoshino in the company of his wife, Princess Uno-no-sarara, later Emperor Jitô. Thus, the ailing Tenji had no other choice than to leave the throne to his son, Prince Ôtomo who, despite his talents and qualifications, was a son of a low-ranking court lady. Shortly after Tenji's passing in the 12<sup>th</sup> month of 671, Ôama launched an attack against his nephew who, left with no chances to win, had to retreat to the mountains where he committed suicide. As a result, Prince Ôama ascended the throne and became Emperor Tenmu, thus creating a "*dynasty within a dynasty*", if one should cite Herman Ooms.<sup>326</sup> While such changes of the successor of the Imperial throne were not unseen in a monarchy such as the Imperial House of Japan<sup>327</sup>, there were never cases in which a sovereign was forcefully deposed by a rebel who later went on to ascend the throne himself. At the same time, it should be noted that the official chronicle Nihonshoki never clarified whether Prince Ôtomo had actually succeeded his father on the throne after the latter's death in 671.<sup>328</sup> If Ôtomo never became Crown Prince, then nothing stood in Ôama's way to try to capture the sovereignty for himself after Tenji's death. If that had not been the case, however, then Ôama's rising an army against Ôtomo would have been an open rebellion against the rightful ruler of the country. While the lack of official information in regard to that matter makes it extremely difficult for one to find the truth, suspicions of Ôama's right to ascend the throne and his legitimacy as a ruler surely remained. That could be proved by seeing his constant attempts to justify his position after his enthronement as Emperor Tenmu. He utilized techniques from different religious, philosophical and political teachings in order to do so.<sup>329</sup>

As a result, Tenmu firstly turned himself toward Buddhism – the religion he was already well-acquainted with. In the year when he was enthroned (673), "*...he hand-copied the Issai-kyô<sup>[330]</sup> sutra collection at Kawaharaji Temple.*"<sup>331</sup> Most likely under Buddhist influence, the sovereign banned the consumption of meat from domestic animals, such as horses, dogs, or monkeys, from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month until the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (674).<sup>332</sup> Moreover, he commissioned the erection of new Buddhist temples and provided household sustenance grants for some of them. The Yakushiji Temple, for example, was built with the specific purpose of praying for the empress' recovery from an illness. Despite his intentions to support Buddhism, however, the emperor clearly showed the Buddhist clergy that they should and could not expect to stand on an

<sup>325</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 297

<sup>326</sup> "Dynastic identities revolve around more than bloodlines. Equally important are perception of founders, lineage composition, and successions, issues that were alive throughout the eighth century, as historians are now discovering. The "Tenmu dynasty" as such was assembled over time, an incessant work of lineage adjustment. The historical record reveals both the elimination of family members that were in line to succeed to the throne and the posthumous addition of relatives and ancestors to lineal positions of honor with royal titles they never held while alive.

According to the logic of biological descent, all rulers from Tenji to Kônin to the present day, except for Tenmu and Junnin, can be traced, via Jitô, as a Tenji dynasty. Jitô's political identity is crucial, for she is at once daughter of the older brother, wife of the younger brother, a successor to the throne after her husband, and grandmother of the next ruler, Monmu.", Ooms 2016: 1

<sup>327</sup> See Ooms 2016: 9

<sup>328</sup> „There was ample reason for blurring the issue in the official record. Indeed, if Ôtomo's succession had taken place, the Tenmu dynasty would have been illegitimate – certainly not an interpretation we would expect from Prince Toneri, Tenmu's son in charge of the compilation of the Nihon shoki, which refers several times to Tenmu as heir.", Ooms 2016: 21

<sup>329</sup> See Ooms 2016: 78, 134

<sup>330</sup> In fact, the Issai-kyô consisted of not only sutras but also of their explanations, as well as Buddhist regulations. With its almost 5400 volumes, it could have been considered an entire corpus of scriptures., See Eikei 1996

<sup>331</sup> Takagi 2018: 112

<sup>332</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 328/329

equal footing with the indigenous beliefs of the people if they were not able to be economically independent. That much could be assumed upon reading his edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (680).

“Henceforward let all temples, with the exception of the two or three great national temples, cease to be administered by officials. But for those which hold a sustenance-fief, a limit from first to last of thirty years is fixed. This will be discontinued when, upon calculating the years, the number of thirty is completed. Moreover the Temple of Asukadera ought not to be included in those administered by officials, but as it was originally a Great Temple, always administered by officials, and has also done good service formerly, — for these reasons it is still retained in the class of officially administered temples.”<sup>333</sup>

Despite the said edict, however, the emperor remained supportive of Buddhism. For example, in 685, the ruler of the state ordered that, “...in every house a Buddhist shrine should be provided, and an image of Buddha with Buddhist scriptures placed there. Worship was to be paid and offerings of food made at these shrines.”<sup>334</sup> On top of that, he actively supported the readings of Buddhist sutras in the whole land, thus making anything possible to establish Buddhism as state religion under the strict surveillance of the state, that is to say the emperor.

In contrast to Emperor Kōtoku, however, Tenmu also showed support for the Japanese indigenous religion. His reverence for the sacred shrine of Ise was narrated in his Nihonshoki chronicles. The emperor even sent his own daughter, Imperial Princess Ōku (Ohoki) to serve as high priestess at Ise.<sup>335</sup> The position had not been filled in the last fifty years and Tenmu’s deed clearly served to show his reverence for the indigenous beliefs of the people. The ceremony of rebuilding the main shrine at Ise (shikinen sengū) is also said to have begun during that emperor’s reign.<sup>336</sup> Moreover, he actively supported Shintōist shrines by restoring some of them or offering financial support to others. Emperor Tenmu even showed support for the local deities – it was with his decree that the kami of the wind and the harvest began to be revered yearly in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> months in the provinces Yamato and Hirose, respectively<sup>337</sup>.

Even though Tenmu was not the first emperor who supported both Buddhism and Shintō, and tried to appeal to common people by showing sympathy for their own beliefs, he was the first sovereign who actively utilized religion in order to justify his position as a supreme ruler of the state. At the same time, however, he seemingly understood that the mere reverence for doctrines and teachings already known in Yamato would not bring him the desired result. Therefore, the emperor turned his eyes toward the teachings from China. According to Herman Ooms, Tenmu and his Empress Uno used the knowledge brought into Yamato by the immigrants (referred to as “Allochthons”) and concentrated their efforts mainly on the sphere of the supernatural.<sup>338</sup> They strived to create a liturgical state revolving around the emperor in its center. In order to create such a state, they mixed the already known religious ceremonies with unknown (Taoist) understandings of similar matters, thus altering Buddhism and Shintō and almost creating new forms of these two religious teachings. For example,

“Tenmu marshaled a number of Daoist signs to articulate a supernatural aura for his rulership. [...] A court ceremony, later known as the Festival for Appeasing the Spirits (Chinkon-sai), has

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<sup>333</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 346

<sup>334</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 369

<sup>335</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 322

<sup>336</sup> See Takagi 2018: 114

<sup>337</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 331, 332

<sup>338</sup> See Ooms 2016: xviii

undeniably Daoist origins. The New Year receptions at the court were organized around symbols with “Daoisant” connotations. In early Heian, possibly earlier, the emperor’s ceremonial coat displayed astral symbolism pivoting around the Pole Star, the heavenly zenith of rulership in Daoist discourse. Nara-era names are replete with Daoist significations.”<sup>339</sup>

Another ceremony introduced by Tenmu was the ôharae (Great Purification) performed for the first time on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of 676. According to Aston, that ceremony is the “*most solemn ceremony of the Shintô religion*”.<sup>340</sup> As Ooms points out, however, in the original text, the ceremony is been referred to as “daikaijo” (大解除), a Taoist term for “great exorcism”.<sup>341</sup> Another trace of Taoist influence at Tenmu’s court was the establishment of a Yin-yang Bureau and an Outer Pharmacy where scholars or Buddhist monks from the continent were in charge of finding and utilizing appropriate ceremonies for the strengthening of the position of the Imperial family. Such was, for example, the case with the shôkon-sai (soul summoning ceremony): at first, the rite was regularly performed in the hope of curing Tenmu’s waning health, but after his death it was performed in order for the deceased sovereign to be able to become “immortal”. As Ooms points out, Tenmu mixed elements of Taoism, Shintô and Buddhism in order to create a completely new rite which later was recognized as one of the most important ceremonies of Shintô.<sup>342</sup>

After such deliberate intertwining of elements from different teachings and doctrines it was only natural for Shintô and Buddhism to undergo a transformation which eventually brought them closer to each other. During Tenmu’s reign Taoism served as the link between the other two religious teachings. Instead of utilizing the Taoist set of principles in the spheres of religion and mysticism, however, Tenmu and his court preferred to use only the beliefs and practices closely connected with medicine, astronomy, alchemy, the calendar, yin-yang and so on. Thus, Taoism met no animosity neither from the indigenous religion nor from Buddhism, as it didn’t overstep into their fields of practice. Instead, the foreign teaching was used to embellish the Shintôist and Buddhist ceremonies with mysticism and to strengthen their meaning in the eyes of the common people. As it was the emperor himself who supported the remodeling of the said religions, it was inevitable that the power of the Imperial House also grew. In contrast to other rulers of the state before him such as Bidatsu or Kôtoku who showed clear preference for one of the two religions, Tenmu took neither side. Instead, he supported Shintô and Buddhism equally. When it came to the indigenous beliefs of the people, he

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<sup>339</sup> Ooms 2016: xix

<sup>340</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 333

<sup>341</sup> See Ooms 2016: 89

<sup>342</sup> „The Shôkon-sai of 685/11/24 was one of the first of many measures taken to restore Tenmu’s health. [...] As far as we know, the onset of his final illness dates from 685/9/24, two weeks before Tenmu dispatched two men to fetch the herb okera from Mino. [...] On the first day of his illness, Tenmu also ordered Buddhist scriptures to be read for three days at three dozen temples – undoubtedly magically significant numbers. At least two dozen similar activities for spiritual remedies were taken during Tenmu’s final year. He had 180 men and women take Buddhist orders, bodhisattva statues set up, temples and pagodas cleaned, penitential services or great purification ceremonies held, and amnesties proclaimed. [...] It is possible that Hôzô, the monk in charge of the whole affair, had diagnosed Tenmu as suffering from a liver disease. Sickness, especially the ruler’s when suffering from a malfunctioning “ruling” organ, is obviously more than a physical ailment. The ontological and cosmological connotations of synchronizing the cure with the winter solstice – the two men were dispatched to Mino on 10/8, six weeks ahead of the important date – were prominently present. [...] . Seven years later (692/2/11), Hôzô is mentioned in the Nihon shoki as drawing the stipend of doctor of yin-yang at the Yin-yang Bureau. [...] To summarize, a Buddhist monk from Paekche, soon appointed as the foremost official authority on matters of yin and yang, plausibly constructed for a Yamato sovereign, newly referred to as heavenly ruler, a Daoist ritual to prolong his life, a ritual that soon became one of the most important imperial ceremonies in the yearly cycle of “Shinto” events at the court, into which later a version of the Amaterasu epic was incorporated along with Buddhist spells.”, Ooms 2016: 162

supported the reconstruction of shrines and put the world of kami under control as he clearly supported the Shrine of Ise as “*the Shrine of Ama-terasu no Oho-kami*”.<sup>343</sup> By promoting a certain deity above the others Tenmu clearly showed not only his desire to create a pantheon of Shintô but also his wish for the indigenous beliefs of the people to be considered a religion under the jurisdiction of the emperor.<sup>344</sup> From that point of view, it was for the sovereign to decide the exact position of each kami in that pantheon. After displaying his power over the realm of the kami it would have been much easier for Tenmu to introduce Taoist techniques and practices into Shintô. Religion which didn’t stand independently but rather existed under the surveillance and absolute control of one person could be remodeled and changed in accordance with the said person’s wishes. By directly showing financial support for Shintô shrines Tenmu made his point clear: Shintô could exist only with the funds given to it by the emperor, without it the kami worship would wither and die.

When it came to Buddhism, an introduction of Taoist practices and teachings into it was much more difficult. After all, the teaching of Buddha had come to Yamato as an established religion, with its own principles, scriptures and practices. From that point of view, Buddhism, relying on that firm basis, could be described as self-sufficient. It would have been good if it had the support of the state represented by the emperor. If that was not the case, however, that should pose no problem. Buddhism would continue to exist even without political help. Its monks and nuns would spread its teachings, roam the country<sup>345</sup> and bring new supporters. Among those some would inevitably want to help financially, thus bringing the much-needed resources for the building of temples or their maintenance. Tenmu, having been a Buddhist himself, surely understood the line of thought of the Buddhists. As a statesman, however, he needed to bring Buddhism under his control. It was dangerous for him and his authority as a ruler to let such an independent religion exist freely and without stately surveillance. For such a free religious teaching, however, a direct interference in its affairs could ricochet against the person trying to do so. Therefore, Tenmu’s touch was much subtler than in the case of Shintô. In the seventh century, Buddhism and its clergy were concentrated mainly in the ceremonial field.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, it was enough for Tenmu to first give the Buddhist clergy hints that he would withdraw the financial support of the state (see the edict from 680) and to make them anxious. Then, he cleverly proposed the performance of certain Taoist or even Shintôist elements or practices before, during, or after Buddhist ceremonies at temples.<sup>347</sup> In that way, he didn’t force a foreign doctrine on Buddhism but rather offered the teaching of Buddha a new point of view. It was left up to its adherents to decide whether to adopt these new techniques or leave them out.

In a nutshell, the outcome of the emperor’s actions was the evolution of the two main religious doctrines in the land: Shintô and Buddhism. Whereas in the case of Shintô the emperor’s interference was more direct, with Buddhism there was only a subtle influence, but the end result was equal for both religions: they became much closer to the central government. As certain elements “imported” from Taoism were incorporated into Shintô and Buddhism, both teachings could now find a common ground. The most important link for them was their connection with the emperor as their main

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<sup>343</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 322

<sup>344</sup> For more information on the political transformation of kami worship, see Teeuwen/Scheid 2002: 197

<sup>345</sup> See Paul/Wilson 1985: 8

<sup>346</sup> See Ooms 2016: 104

<sup>347</sup> „The set of rituals Tenmu and Jitô created to provide their power with a fitting symbolics was not indebted to Buddhism. These rituals were mostly new, and of not, they were put to new uses. Most famous, perhaps, is the regular, twice-yearly Great Purification, incorporated as such in the Taihō codes, but already mentioned under Tenmu’s rule. [...] Two separate rituals were performed during Great Purifications. A kami-related one was conducted by the Nakatomi court ritualists, and a Chinese, Daoist one by allochthon diviners (urabe), most likely from the Fubito clans of Yamato and Kawachi.”, Ooms 2016: 55/56

supporter and overseer. Thus, Tenmu's strategy sowed the seeds which his successors on the Imperial throne later reaped: they could retain their Buddhist belief and at the same time support Shintô, and be accepted by the common people in that double role. After Tenmu's "reforms", a Japanese Buddhism was created<sup>348</sup> which was connected with the indigenous beliefs of the people and could therefore be accepted much easier. Buddhism's concentration in the ceremonial field and Shintô's focus on the supernatural were connected and combined thanks to the Taoist knowledge. The foreign teaching's readings of medicine, astrology, calendar, or yin-yang could, on the other hand, not exist without paraphernalia to represent them. Therefore, an intertwining with Shintô and Buddhism was inevitable. Only the supernatural beliefs of the former and the ceremonial of the latter could properly utilize all that knowledge.<sup>349</sup> In that way, the two religious teachings could strengthen their influence among the masses, and new knowledge was brought into Yamato under the form of ceremonies or rites.

The next step in the development of Buddhism and Shintô was taken during the reign of Emperor Shômu, the second-to-last ruler from the Tenmu dynasty. During his time, the establishment of Buddhism as a state religion reached its prime. Devout supporter of Buddha's teaching, the sovereign ensured its stability and incorporated it into the Imperial authority. Not long after Shômu's ascension to the throne in 724 problems began to emerge before the young emperor. Throughout the Tenpyô era (729 – 749), the country was plagued by natural disasters, diseases and mysterious phenomena. In various provinces there were outbreaks of plague, and drought periodically struck the land causing unrest among the population. As those disasters occurred, the emperor managed to convince himself that his behavior and apparent lack of virtue were the cause of them. In order to win Heaven's favor, Shômu gave offerings, prayed to the gods, performed sutra chanting, ordered many people to take the tonsure, granted pardons, but eventually none of those measures was effective. The final blow for his beliefs was the outbreak of smallpox throughout the land (735 – 737) which took the lives of the four Fujiwara brothers, Muchimaro, Fusasaki, Umakai and Maro<sup>350</sup>, who had been siblings of Shômu's empress Kômyôshi and had played a central role in the state government after their sister's elevation to the position. At the same time, natural disasters and phenomena occurred with conspicuous frequency. For example, according to Shoku Nihongi's chronicles, earthquakes happened every day of the first half of the fifth month of Tenpyô 17 (745).<sup>351</sup> As a result, the emperor began to accept those disasters as Heaven's punishment due to his own "lack of virtue" and decided to take solace in the teaching of Buddha which he devoutly supported. That conviction of his was strengthened by the constant presence of a Buddhist party at court which emerged after the death of the four Fujiwara brothers. The fact that the emperor did not fall ill with any of the plagues that raged throughout the country was considered a miracle supposedly born out of the ardent prayers of monk Genbô. As a result, Shômu encouraged and supported the Buddhist party at court to the point that it was able to overtake many important court affairs. As Ross Bender points out,

"The Naidôjô was the first permanent institutional entry which Buddhism gained to the imperial palace and it was to be a key factor in the later rise of Dôkyô.

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<sup>348</sup> "Up to just one hundred years ago, what constituted the religion and thought of the Japanese people in most periods of history was something historical – that is, something assimilated or formulated or fabricated by the people, whether it was native or foreign in origin. This thing was truly something indigenous. In concrete terms, this was the kenmitsu Buddhist system including its components, such as Shinto and the Yin-yang tradition, and its various branches, both reformist and heretical. It [...] was the comprehensive, unified, and self-defined system of religious thought produced by Japan in pre-modern times.", Kuroda 1981: 20

<sup>349</sup> See Ooms 2016: 104

<sup>350</sup> See Takagi 2018: 185/186

<sup>351</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyô] 17



[...] The construction of the system of provincial temples may have been to some degree due to Gembô's instigation, [...] But Shômu himself was likely the major force behind the temples' establishment. [...] In that year [728] he ordered ten scrolls of the Konkômyô Sutra dispatched to each province to have them read for the peace of the nation; the doctrine which undergirded the system was the belief that Guardian Kings would protect those countries which revered the Buddhist teaching. Then, in 741, an edict was proclaimed; in each province a monastery and nunnery were to be erected, the former to be called Konkômyô Shitennô Gokuko no Tera and the latter Hokke Genzai no Terai. The collective term for the system was Kokubunji. Each temple was assigned sustenance land and the sutras were to be read every month for the peace of the people and the protection of the nation."<sup>352</sup>

The final step in his strategy to obtain the mercy of Buddha was eventually taken in 743 when Shômu commissioned the construction of the Great Buddha (Daibutsu) at Tôdaiji Temple. For such a huge image to be erected, enormous financial resources were required. Therefore, the ruler of the state sought the support of the Buddhist monk Gyôki. He was a wandering monk unattached to any specific temple who found solace in freely roaming the country, meeting new people, preaching, and engaging in public works such as the construction of bridges, irrigation systems, infirmaries, and so on. Therefore, he was chosen by Shômu as the perfect man for the task of raising funds and labor hand.<sup>353</sup> Christine Guth Kanda explains that in his ardour Gyôki reached even the Ise shrine in the hope of winning the support of the Sun Goddess.<sup>354</sup> As the monk proceeded with his task, however, opposition arose. It is unclear whether it was directly related to his fundraising which diminished the funds of other Buddhist temples, or it had something to do with the erection of such a big Buddhist statue at land that supposedly revered the indigenous deities. Remarkable, however, is the fact that the priests of a certain Shintô shrine never protested against the construction of the Great Buddha at Tôdaiji. It was situated in Usa and revered the deity Hachiman.

#### The Hachiman cult: the fruit of the amalgamation of Shintô and Buddhism

Despite Hachiman's official acceptance among the Shintô deities, his origins remain more or less unclear. As Christine Guth Kanda points out,

"Unlike most deities with a national following, the name Hachiman appears neither in Kojiki nor in Nihon shoki. In fact, the earliest reference to Hachiman does not occur until 737 in Shoku Nihongi (sequel to Chronicles of Japan), itself compiled in the last part of the eighth century. Only documents of relatively late date and often questionable reliability permit a shaky reconstruction of the early history of this deity and his worship at Usa. [...]"

The origins and significance of the name Hachiman are heatedly debated by scholars. Most kami are known simply by the name of the principal site of their cult, but there are no references to an Usa Shrine until after 859, when it became necessary to distinguish between the Hachiman Shrine at Usa and the one at Iwashimizu. Instead, all early documents refer to the deity "Yahata" – an alternate reading of Hachiman – and to the Yahata Shrine. Yet no place by this name exists in the Usa area. Many scholars believe "Yahata" to be a distortion of the name of the place where the cult first developed and its etymology to be the key to unlocking Hachiman's origins."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Bender (e) 1980: 18/19

<sup>353</sup> See Deal/Ruppert 2015: 64

<sup>354</sup> Kanda 1985: 40

<sup>355</sup> Kanda 1985: 37

Kanda cites the study of a certain Nakano Hayatoshi<sup>356</sup>, born and raised in Usa, who sought the origin of Hachiman in the history of the clans, their revered deities, as well as the ceremonies and the shintai<sup>357</sup> first associated with the Hachiman Shrine. When it comes to ceremonies, the two most important rites at the Usa shrine are the hōjō-e and gyōkō-e. The former is a Buddhist ritual commemorating Buddha's prohibition of fishing and hunting.

“Nakano sees this Buddhist symbolism as a later overlay on an ancient ritual of renewal, which involved the union of previously autonomous regions. The heart of the yearly hōjō-e, in fact, the replacement of Hachiman's shintai, a copper mirror made by a priest of the Komiya Hachiman Shrine from metals mined from Mount Kawara, located directly behind the shrine. On completion, the mirror is carried by parishioners from Mount Kawara eastward through Buzen Province to Usa Shrine where it remains until the following year.”<sup>358</sup>

The circumstances behind the gyōkō-e are almost as complex as those behind the hōjō-e. The ceremony, the rites connected with it as well as the shintai to be replaced differ from region to region. Nevertheless, in general, the gyōkō-e centers on the replacing of the so-called “komo no makura”, pillow from komo reed, another symbol of Hachiman.

“This shintai, made from komo, a reed which grows in Hishikata Pond in the town of Nakatsu, some six kilometers to the west of Usa, is carried from there through an area roughly corresponding to the former southern Buzen and northern Bungo provinces. When the new shintai is in place, the old komo no makura is transferred from the Usa Hachiman Shrine to the Nata Hachiman Shrine; in turn, the latter's shintai moves on to the Ina Shrine, and so forth until all the shrines in the network (which extends to Shikoku) have a new komo no makura. Nakano believes that, in the Heian period, images as well as sacred garments were transferred from one shrine to another as part of the gyōkō-e. Through the hōjō-e and the gyōkō-e, widely disparate local shrines were drawn into the sacred activities of the Usa Shrine. The Usa Shrine is unique in such rites of renewal involving two different shintai.”<sup>359</sup>

According to Nakano's study, the performance of the hōjō-e and gyōkō-e, ceremonies that differ in the object believed to contain the said deity's nature, only strengthens the hypothesis that the so-called Hachiman cult emerged through the consolidation of two adjacent regions in northern Kyūshū that not only had two different religious traditions but also honored two different deities.<sup>360</sup> Nakano identifies those two regions as Yama no Kuni and Toyo no Kuni. After their consolidation, which most likely took place between the third and fifth centuries, a name for their common deity was created: Yamatoyo, which was a mixture of the names of the two regions. Later, it underwent some changes and evolved first into Yabata (or, Yahata)<sup>361</sup>. The ancient Japanese pronunciation was “yawata” and the characters read as “eight banners”. Supposedly, that was the name by which Hachiman was first known.

Another interesting peculiarity in regard to the deity of Usa is that the shrine of Hachiman has three hereditary priestly families: Usa, Karashima, and Oga. Nakano believes that the former two are descendants of the clans Yama no Kuni and Toyo no Kuni. The Usa clan worshipped the goddess Himegami as the protector of sea travel and agriculture. The Karashima clan could trace its origins back to

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<sup>356</sup> See Kanda 1985: 37/38

<sup>357</sup> „神体, 御神体, 御霊: An object of worship in which the spirit of a deity is believed to reside. A symbol or medium of the spirit of a deity.”, See Kokudai Gakuin Digital Museum, Shintai

<sup>358</sup> Kanda 1985: 37

<sup>359</sup> Kanda 1985: 38

<sup>360</sup> See Kanda 1985: 38

<sup>361</sup> See Kanda 1985: 38

Korean immigrants. Their deity of worship was the goddess of Mount Kawara: Kara Kuni Okinaga Ohime no Mikoto – a name common to deified shamanesses. Mount Kawara was an important source of copper, a fact which determined the nature of its deity as a guardian of miners and metal-workers. Somewhat different is the history of the third priestly family, the Oga. According to Nakano,

“The Oga, a branch of the Miwa clan, the hereditary priests of the Omiwa Shrine in present-day Nara Prefecture, may have been sent to the Usa area in the sixth century by the Yamato court. The Oga seem to have been devotees of Empress Jingû and her son Ojin. *Nihon shoki* testifies to their longstanding ties with northern Kyushu: in order to raise an army before embarking on a punitive expedition on the Korean peninsula, Jingû had to appease the Omiwa gods by constructing a shrine in their honor. Worship of this mother-son pair was widespread in northern Kyushu, especially in Chikuzen Province where Jingû had set sail for Korea and where her son was born after a miraculous twelve-month gestation. The Oga may have contributed to the growth of the cult at Usa of a mother-son pair identified with Empress Jingû and Emperor Ojin.”<sup>362</sup>

Bernhard Scheid gives the reader more information in regard to the connection between Hachiman and the mother-son pair Jingû-Ôjin.

“Sein [*Hachimans*] Name findet sich zwar, wie erwähnt, nirgends in den Chroniken des Götterzeitalters, doch wurde er zu einer Inkarnation des halbmythologischen Tennō Ôjin erklärt, der ja seinerseits durch seine Mutter Jingû starke Wurzeln in Kyushu besitzt. Die meisten Hachiman-Schreine verehren daher Ôjin und seine Mutter Jingû, zu denen sich entweder die erwähnte weibliche Begleiterin Himegami oder Takeuchi no Sukune 武内宿禰 gesellen. Letzterer tritt in der Jingû-Mythe als engster Berater der Herrscherin und Ersatzvater von Ôjin auf. Von dieser Mythe ausgehend entwickeln die meisten Hachiman-Chroniken eine zunehmend bunter ausgeführte, auf buddhistischen Wiedergeburtsvorstellungen basierende Hagiographie von Ôjins späteren Reinkarnationen, die ihn u.a. nach China führt und ihn schließlich unter dem Namen Hachiman die Bodhisattvaschaft erlangen lässt.”<sup>363</sup>

Interestingly enough, Scheid argues that such type of myths became popular only in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, thus contradicting Nakano’s theory about a connection between the Oga clan, Hachiman and the Jingû-Ôjin cult.<sup>364</sup> In any case, even if one does exclude the potential mother-son cult from the initial image of Hachiman, one still sees that he combined the characteristics of the guardian deities of the families Usa and Karashima, which made him not a single deity but rather a collective image of at least two gods. Interestingly enough, these two deities had a rather practical nature: Himegami was a protector of sea travel and agriculture, while Kara Kuni Okinaga Ohime no Mikoto was the guardian of miners and metal-workers. As Bernhard Scheid rightfully points out, in all that mixture, one should also not forget the influence of Buddhism.

“Moreover, his main place of worship seems to have shifted between various locations before settling in today’s Usa Jingû 宇佐神宮, where Hachiman was worshiped together with Miroku Bosatsu 弥勒菩薩 in one of Japan’s first “shrine temple complexes” (jingûji 神宮寺). Thus, already in Kyushu, Buddhism also played an important role in the establishment of Hachiman.

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<sup>362</sup> Kanda 1985: 38

<sup>363</sup> Scheid (b) 2014: 272

<sup>364</sup> Scheid (b) 2014: 272. In his essay „Shômu Tennô and the Deity from Kyûshû”, the author describes these myths as “invented traditions” of the Nara or early Heian periods”, see Scheid (a) 2014: 32

In this sense, Hachiman can be regarded as a hybrid, supra local deity, uniting different regional interests and religious aspects.”<sup>365</sup>

Anyway, as Ross Bender points out, nowadays Hachiman is known primarily as the Shintô god of war. Such a description has probably something to do with the original name of the deity Yawata which meant “eight banners”. After all, “...the 'banners' refer to a Chinese system of banner standards for troops and hence have a military significance...”<sup>366</sup> Bender sees the Minamoto cult as the main source of the “god-of-war” description.<sup>367</sup> The Heike Monogatari narrates the circumstances around the Battle of Yashima in early 1185 in which the Taira forces challenged the Minamoto to shoot a fan a woman held up at the tip of a pole on a swaying boat. Nasu no Yoichi, ordered by Minamoto no Yoshitsune, successfully shot down the fan. It is narrated that before shooting, he prayed to Hachiman, thus identifying the deity as the guardian of Minamoto, or the samurai in general.<sup>368</sup> To be precise, however, according to some documents from the Hachiman shrine at Usa, prayers to that particular deity in regard to military matters could be traced back to a much earlier time than the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the eighth century (708 – 714 and 717 – 723), southern Kyûshû was troubled by series of uprisings of the Hayato. The most important uprising was the rebellion in Ôsumi and Hyûga from 720. The event is recorded in Shoku Nihongi<sup>369</sup>, but there is no reference whatsoever to Hachiman. However, as Bender points out,

“Shrine documents, [...], note in their report of the incident that prayers were made at the Hachiman shrine and that the priests led a divine army to subjugate the Hayato. One scholar concludes from this that the Dazaifu prayed to Hachiman in wartime as an important local deity.”<sup>370</sup>

Moreover, as Bernhard Scheid explains,

“Auch wenn die Historizität dieser Ereignisse keineswegs über jeden Zweifel erhaben ist, kann man davon ausgehen, dass sich Hachimans erste Kultstätte, der heutige Usa Hachiman-Schrein 宇佐八幡宮 in der Präfektur Ôita, in einer politisch instabilen Region befand und aufgrund ihrer Yamato-freundlichen Rolle in der ersten Hälfte des achten Jahrhunderts erstmals die Aufmerksamkeit des Hofes erhielt.”<sup>371</sup>

Thus, it could be assumed that the first prayers to Hachiman as a deity of war in which the people put their faith during times of unrest were made several years before the beginning of Emperor Shômu's reign. Further confirmation of that view as well as Hachiman's reputation as a god of war could be found in Shoku Nihongi's chronicle from the 4<sup>th</sup> month of 737. According to it, Emperor Tenmu's court sent offerings to five distinguished shrines including that of Hachiman from Usa on the occasion of frictions with Silla.<sup>372</sup>

As a result, from 737 onward, the importance of the god from Usa only continued to grow rapidly. He was given even more abilities such as oracle talents for seeing the future. Eventually, during Emperor Shômu's (and partially Kôken/Shôtoku's) reign(s), the cult of Hachiman put even that of the Sun

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<sup>365</sup> Scheid (a) 2014: 34

<sup>366</sup> Bender (d) 1979: 128

<sup>367</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 126

<sup>368</sup> See Heike Monogatari, Chapter V, transl. by The Asiatic Society of Japan: 235

<sup>369</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 養老 [Yôrô] 4.3.4

<sup>370</sup> Bender (e) 1980: 14/15

<sup>371</sup> Scheid (b) 2014: 265

<sup>372</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyô] 9.4.1

Goddess in the shade. One wonders what made Hachiman – not a typical Shintô deity, not even a single deity but rather a collective image of three kami – so important for Shômu. Bernhard Scheid points out two major reasons for that:

“1) Hachiman’s relative independence from the existing network of aristocratic ancestor deities, which turned him into an impartial outsider unaffected by the complicated politico-religious machinations at court; and 2) Shômu’s attempt to establish a politico-religious stronghold in Kyushu independent from the local government, the Dazaifu.”<sup>373</sup>

It can be inferred from that passage that Shômu’s interest in Hachiman could not be attributed solely to his religious devotion. Rather, the emperor utilized religion in his attempt to strengthen his political power. In contrast to his predecessor Tenmu, however, Emperor Shômu didn’t decide on mystical knowledge but chose to rely on local religious symbols instead. In the case of Hachiman, the deity’s origins, the geographical position of Usa as well as Kyûshû’s proximity to the continent were the main factors behind Shômu’s decision to revere the god from Usa as a guardian deity:

“As Yoshii Yoshitaka points out, Usa is mentioned in the Nihongi in connection with the legend of Jimmu’s progress to the east, the chronicle relating that, during Jimmu’s campaign, the expedition paused in Usa and was entertained by the local nobility. Then, by imperial command, a princess of the region was married to the emperor’s minister, who was an ancestor of the Nakatomi. [...] more significant was Usa’s geographical position between the continent and the Yamato court: a coastal area in northern Kyushu with a good harbor, it was certainly in an excellent position to receive and transmit new cultural impulses to the court.

There is in fact evidence that the Buzen region was known at Nara for a unique and powerful religious culture. Nishida Nagao believes that there was a form of Buddhism in the area which had been transmitted from the continent earlier than the official introduction of Buddhism at court in 552; he speculates that this north Kyushu Buddhism was distinguished by its special emphasis on healing arts and that its priests were famed for their curative powers.”<sup>374</sup>

It could be assumed that due to their near position to the continent Kyûshû and the Buzen region, in particular, were under the constant influx of foreign influences, religious movements included. As Nakano Hatayoshi explains, there was a difference between the Buzen priestesses and those from elsewhere in Japan that could be attributed to the combination of Korean, Buddhist, and native beliefs. In Nara, that same combination was in turn seen as potent magic.<sup>375</sup>

To sum up, the deity from Usa could be utilized as the perfect vessel for both the emperor’s political intentions and his religious preferences. Thus, when in 743 Shômu conceived the idea of commissioning a huge statue of Buddha Vairocana and needed the support of a Shintô deity to justify the huge resources which would be put into the construction, Hachiman turned out to be a more desirable support than even the Sun Goddess. A potential reason for the sovereign’s decision could be attributed to the deity of Usa’s protection of the metal-workers and miners. As huge amounts of gold and copper were needed for the construction of the temple and the statue, Kyûshû with its mines was a vital point for the success of Shômu’s ambitious plan. That hypothesis could find its confirmation upon reading the emperor’s Imperial edict from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô shôhō 1 (749). In it, the ruler explains that

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<sup>373</sup> Scheid (a) 2014: 31

<sup>374</sup> Bender (e) 1980: 12/13

<sup>375</sup> See Nakano 1967: 112

“When pondering these things we heard that among all laws the words of the Buddha are superior in protecting nations, we placed the Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings in all the provinces under Heaven which we govern, and said that we would construct an image of Rushana Buddha. [...] But many people were doubtful of success, and We ourselves were anxious that there would not be enough gold.

Then We received the omen of the divine word of the Three Treasures, and the kami which are in heaven and the kami which are on earth together vouchsafed particularly good fortune, and also the divine spirits of the ancestral Emperors granted their blessing, and they cherished us with particular affection, and made the gold appear.”<sup>376</sup>

According to Scheid, the said edict could be interpreted as follows:

“Auf eine noch kürzere Formel gebracht, lässt sich Shōmus Edikt auch folgendermaßen zusammenfassen: „Buddha schützt Staat – Staat errichtet Buddha ein Monument – Kami ermöglichen dies.“<sup>377</sup>

Interestingly enough, in the senmyō from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō shōhō 1 (749), the name of Hachiman could be found nowhere. The Imperial edict from the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the same year, however, makes it explicitly clear that it was the “Great Kami Yawata of the Broad Ways” who supported the construction of the Great Buddha at Tōdaiji with any means possible.

“In the recent year of Tenpyō 12 We worshipped the Rushana Buddha at the Chishikiji in the Ohogata district of Kawachi. Because We desired to construct such an image and yet were unable to do so, we appealed to the Great Kami Yawata of the Broad Ways who dwells in the Usa district of Buzen Province.

The god gave an edict:

'We, as a kami, leading and inviting

The kami of heaven and earth

Shall certainly accomplish this thing.

We will turn water into steam for the casting of copper,

We will merge our body with the grass, trees and earth.

It shall be done without hindrance.”<sup>378</sup>

Christine Guth Kanda also supports that theory and further elaborates that the interest in Hachiman laid not only in his unique nature but also in the clans which revered him.<sup>379</sup> With the agriculture skills of the Usa clan and the Karashima's Korean knowledge as well as the worship of Mount Kawara, an important source of copper, it would have been much easier for Shōmu to achieve his goal. Thus, with the emperor's blessing, the Usa priests and the deity honored by them became involved in the erection of the Daibutsu. It seems that the tendency to rely on Hachiman for the construction and later maintenance of the Buddha image continued even after Shōmu's reign. According to Kanda,

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<sup>376</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 22/23

<sup>377</sup> Scheid (b) 2014: 267

<sup>378</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 28

<sup>379</sup> See Kanda 1985: 40

“Shôsôin documents testify that the shrine contributed funds towards the project. [...] Again in 855, it is recorded that when the Daibutsu needed repairs, prayers were addressed at the Usa Hachiman Shrine.”<sup>380</sup>

Now, the second reason mentioned by Scheid also needs further explanation. Despite Kyûshû’s fame as the “gate to Yamato” through which all innovations found their way into Japan, namely the southern island’s closeness to the continent left it vulnerable to attacks from in- and outside. Therefore, the political reforms put into effect with the Taika Reform (645) and the Taihō Code (703) ensured the appointment of Dazai Sochi (Governor General of Kyûshû), a rank that ranked just below the Chûnagon (counsellor of second rank) in the court hierarchy.<sup>381</sup> Under his jurisdiction were not only the secular but also the religious matters in Kyûshû.<sup>382</sup> It could be said that the vast scope of Dazai Sochi’s authority ensured the establishment of a state within the state. To make matters worse, Shōmu’s close association with the Fujiwara family<sup>383</sup> made them the main candidates for the position. However, despite the emperor’s ties with the Fujiwara, a governor who held absolute political and religious power in his province could have posed a threat to the authority of the sovereign. Thus, by supporting Hachiman, the ruler of the state hoped to counterbalance the power of the Fujiwara in Kyûshû and to establish his own stronghold on the southern island.

Under such political circumstances, it should be no wonder that the establishment of Hachiman as a deity almost on the same level as the Sun Goddess in the Shintō pantheon continued. In 745, offerings were made to the Usa shrine and seven images of the Yakushiji Buddha were erected there.<sup>384</sup> Then, as Bernhard Scheid explains, the next year saw the peak of the relationship between Emperor Shōmu and Hachiman.

“As Hasebe Masashi has shown, however, the decisive turning point for the Shōmu-Hachiman relationship seems to be the year 746, when Shōmu attributed his recovery from an illness to Hachiman, and rewarded the deity with special ranks and estates.”<sup>385</sup>

Two years later, Usa shrine officials were promoted.<sup>386</sup> Then, in 749, two years before the completion of the Daibutsu, in accordance with the deity’s “wishes”, a procession was organized for the transfer of Hachiman and Hime-gami from Usa to Nara. A Hachiman Shrine for the two deities was to be established at Tôdaiji. The procession was headed by the Hachiman shrine priestess Oga Morime and the priest Oga Tamuramaro, a relative of hers. Interesting peculiarity is that the colour of the palanquin in which the priestess was carried throughout the whole month necessary for the procession to reach the capital was purple: a shade otherwise used only by the emperor himself. Upon the arrival of the procession in the vicinity of the capital, it was welcomed by Buddhist monks and court members, and Hachiman was worshipped on the grounds of the imperial palace before being installed in a shrine on the compounds of Tôdaiji. In the presence of Retired Emperor Shōmu, his empress Kōmyōshi and the sitting sovereign Kōken an edict was read in which Shōmu expressed his gratitude toward Hachiman for the deity’s constant support and help.<sup>387</sup> The senmyō doesn’t give any specifics about the nature

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<sup>380</sup> Kanda 1985: 40

<sup>381</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 131

<sup>382</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 131

<sup>383</sup> Shōmu was son of Emperor Monmu and Fujiwara no Miyako, and his Empress Kōmyōshi was also of Fujiwara descent.

<sup>384</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 17.9.20

<sup>385</sup> See Scheid (a) 2014: 32/33

<sup>386</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 20.8.17

<sup>387</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō Shōhō] 1.12.27; Bender (e) 1980: 22/23; Scheid (b) 2014: 267/268

of the god's help, but, if the theory about Hachiman being a collective image of three other Shintô deities is true<sup>388</sup>, then it most likely had something to do with the resources of Mount Kawara, the guardian deity of which looked over the deposits of copper to be found there.<sup>389</sup>

All in all, it could be seen how much the influence of the deity and the nuns and priests serving him had risen for a relatively short period of time. A god who was not even mentioned in the old Japanese chronicles Kojiki and Nihonshoki had suddenly become more revered than the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The latter could be proved if one compares the court ranks held by their respective priestesses. By 750, the priestess of Usa held fourth rank while that of Ise held only the fifth rank. From that point of view, it should be no surprise that the deity from Usa remained (in)directly at court and was even entangled in political appointments.<sup>390</sup> In the same 750, for example, Fujiwara no Otomaro was appointed to the position of Dazai sochi, the reason for that being that Hachiman had supposedly expressed his will on the matter. That was the first case in which the deity from Usa was used to justify a political appointment. As Ross Bender points out, there is not enough information about the nature of Hachiman's oracles nor as of how they were proclaimed. There was evidence that the kanzukasa (the person who administered religious rituals within the Dazaifu jurisdiction) served as an interpreter for the deity and thus held great responsibility.<sup>391</sup> In the years to follow, the authority of the deity from Usa continued to be unrivaled. Hachiman supposedly expressed his wishes regularly and thus began to be revered as the bridge between the other Shintô deities and the people.

In that train of thought, a certain peculiarity should be noted: in the times when Hachiman was on the rise and "spoke" to the people, the main Shintô deity, the Sun Goddess, remained silent.<sup>392</sup> One of the reasons for that "attitude" of Amaterasu could be attributed to her anger about her being put only second to Hachiman, a relatively young and until recently unknown deity from another island. Another much more realistic reason could be that the function of the main priestess at Ise did not entail the interpretation of prophecies.<sup>393</sup> The saiô's main role was to serve the Protector-deity, that is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Of course, certain qualifications were needed for that purpose, but they did not encompass communication with the goddess.<sup>394</sup> In historical plan, the first saiô was thought to be just an "Imperial ambassador" to the shrine and namely in that capacity did she shoulder the immense responsibility and duty to serve the Sun Goddess well in order for the country and the Imperial House to prosper. For that purpose alone, it was often the case that the position of main priestess at Ise was given to female members of the Imperial House – unmarried daughters, sisters, or even aunts. Anyway, as things turned out during Emperor Shômu's reign, neither Amaterasu's position as Protector-deity of the emperor nor the importance and the political authority of her main priestess could prevent Hachiman's rise to religious importance.

In short, it could be concluded that Emperor Shômu's reign brought the development of the Japanese Buddhism to its end. In that long process, there were also rulers such as Bidatsu or Kôtoke who openly showed their favor to one of the two religious teachings. What pushed the development of the Japanese Buddhism forward, however, was the appearance of sovereigns such as Yômei, Suiko or Tenmu who, despite their own religious preferences, acknowledged the truth that they had to accept

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<sup>388</sup> See Kanda 1985: 38

<sup>389</sup> See Kanda 1985: 40

<sup>390</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 23/24

<sup>391</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 24/25

<sup>392</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 29

<sup>393</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 29

<sup>394</sup> „The Saigû, the imperial princess serving as a priestess at Ise was, according to Robert Ellwood's study, "neither shamaness nor medium" up through the time of the Engi shiki (early 10<sup>th</sup> century).", Bender (e) 1980: 29/30; Ellwood 1967: 38



Buddhism and to utilize it for the stability of the state. To achieve their purpose, those emperors used different strategies. For example, Yōmei revered the indigenous beliefs of the people, but also demonstrated his firm will to make Buddhism a part of the religious life of the people. The emperor also indirectly showed his intention to put religion under his control. That strategy was further developed at the court of Emperor Suiko. Her Crown Prince Shōtoku Taishi utilized Confucian teachings in order to bring Shintō and Buddhism closer to each other. He predicted that that tactic would put both religions under the direct control of the emperor and thus the sovereign's authority as supreme religious and secular leader would be strengthened. Later on, Emperor Tenmu went even further. He utilized another Chinese doctrine, that of Taoism, and applied it in such a way that it would be easily accepted by the people. The spheres which the emperor tried to influence through the new teaching were coincidentally (or not) those which were closely connected with both Shintō and Buddhism. Thus, he pulled through the goal which many rulers of the state before him tried to achieve: to put the two religions under imperial control. In doing so Tenmu also managed to mix Shintōist and Buddhist ceremonies and rituals to such an extent that finding the dividing line between them was not so easy anymore. That tendency became even stronger during the reign of Emperor Shōmu. He managed to strengthen his authority by using Shintō deity, a collective image of three kami, in order to justify his pro-Buddhist policy. However, under such religious circumstances in the Yamato state, one begins to wonder what had become of the role of the female as a bridge between the human world and the realm of the deities.

## THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE FEMALES' ROLE IN THE EARLY JAPANESE STATE

### Religious function of the females in the Japanese tribal society

As it was already mentioned, the Yayoi period in Japan was marked by the increased contacts with Korea and China and the import of goods among which the iron played an important role in the development of the early Japanese society. As the possession of iron blades and tools was something very hard to achieve at the time, the local chieftains who were able to establish connections with the continent and to import iron ore could attain authority and military power and, according to Aoki Michiko<sup>395</sup>, eventually they became the driving force which laid the foundation of the local aristocracy in Japan. Unlike Kidder and Kamstra who explain the development of the early Japanese nobility and the Imperial line with outer influences such as invasion of horse-riding tribes, Aoki associates the formation of the Japanese state mainly with inner factors such as the local chieftains' desire to strengthen their military prowess and to stabilize their economic situation, as well as their firm will to find their respective place among the other Asian civilizations. Thus, she agrees with the Japanese historians who report about Prince Mima (supposedly Emperor Sujin) who was able to unify the tribes in the Nara basin.<sup>396</sup> The Prince's presence in the region introduced a change in the political and social order of its people. Aoki argues that the tribes that fell under Emperor Sujin's sovereignty most probably have had female chieftains before his arrival there. These women seem to have been shamanesses who, thanks to their religious functions, were also revered as secular leaders of their respective clans. Mima's invasion in the Nara basin, however, promoted the rise to power of warriors who, due to their contacts with the continent, attained the means not only to defend themselves but also to strive for wider territories and more power. As a result, they were able to take over many of

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<sup>395</sup> See Aoki 2015: 18/19

<sup>396</sup> See Aoki 2015: 18

the secular functions of the female chieftains and eventually were able to oust them from their supreme position in the tribe.<sup>397</sup>

With all that being said, however, one could argue whether the “*radical shake-up of the political structure in the Yamato region*”<sup>398</sup> could be attributed entirely to local outer factors which had nothing to do with the internal processes taking place within the respective tribes. While not completely false, such statement is also not entirely true. Although the origin of the change laid in the increasing contacts with the continent and the import of goods from overseas, it is an undeniable fact that the local warriors were those who strived for development and progress. That could hardly be seen as surprise. In a society led by a female with mostly religious functions someone had to take care of the non-religious affairs. It seems possible that the male warriors who later replaced the female shamanesses at the top of the social order functioned as co-rulers in charge of the secular affairs of the tribe.<sup>399</sup> A leap from co-rule to gradual overtaking of authority could have been easily attained with only a slight push. In that case, the overseas contacts and the import of goods were the impetus which propelled the change in the political and social system. However, even though the female chieftains eventually lost their supreme authority over the tribe, their religious functions remained unaffected. Gradually, an equilibrium between religious and secular authority could be established.

“As the chieftains spread their influence and added new districts under their control, they discovered that arms alone could not contain the population from whom taxes and tithes must be levied to sustain the aristocracy. Women were found to make excellent local leaders, quite willing to collect taxes in return for protection against armed invaders. In time, therefore, a system evolved in which the strongest man served as a deputy to the priestess (or female chieftain) of each area. The rank-and-file soldiers recruited from among the farmers and fishermen were commanded by the deputy strongman. The duties of the female chieftain centered on the spiritual concerns of the people, while the male deputy handled the political and economic matters...”<sup>400</sup>

Thus, the female authority was not completely lost in favor of the military power, it rather underwent a change so it now represented the spiritual life of the society.

Of course, the new social order didn't spread with the same speed and intensity throughout all regions of early Japan. In some areas, female supreme authority was preserved far longer after the “*shake-up of the political structure*” took place. That could be deducted from some reports found in historical sources from later times such as Fudoki (compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century). There, the narratives from various provinces often mention the word “*tsuchigumo*”. As the same word could also be found in Nihonshoki, W.G. Aston gives the reader a brief explanation. According to his argumentation, the “*tsuchigumo*” were most likely “*outlaws who defied the Imperial authority.*” They inhabited all regions of Japan such as Yamato, Harima, even Kyûshû. As they were named “*tsuchigumo*” (literally “*earth spider*”), they were often described as pygmy people with “*short bodies, and long arms and legs*”. According to Aston, however, such description is the product of popular imagination working on the name “*tsuchigumo*”. The name is most likely a deviation from the word “*komori*” (“*to hide*”), which would change the meaning of the name to “*earth-hiders*”.<sup>401</sup> According to Fudoki reports, the *tsuchigumo* lived in caves or in pit-dwellings, which could also have contributed to the origin of the

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<sup>397</sup> See Aoki 2015: 18

<sup>398</sup> Aoki 2015: 19

<sup>399</sup> See Aoki 2015: 19

<sup>400</sup> Aoki 2015: 19

<sup>401</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 137

interpretation “earth spiders”. Anyway, in a report from Hizen no Kuni Fudoki, for example, one finds that in some of these outlaw tribes a strong system of female leadership was the standard form of government:

をみなやま 景行すめらみこと つちぐもやそをみな やまのいただき  
 “嬢子山。【在郡東北。】同天皇，行幸之時，土蜘蛛八十女人，有此山頂，常  
 さかへおほみこと まつろひ いくさびとおそひほろぼさしたまひき  
 捍皇命，不肯降服。於茲，遣兵掩滅。因曰嬢子山。”

[Womina Yama. [Northeast of the district office.] When the same emperor [Emperor Keikō] travelled in this area, there were eighty female Tsuchigumo living on the mountain top. They resisted the royal order relentlessly and refused to surrender. Therefore, the emperor sent an army to destroy them. [These women are] the reason why the hills are called Womina Yama.]<sup>402</sup>

In that report, the idea of female leadership goes even further as a tribe consisting only of women is described. Similar to the mythical Amazons from the Greek mythology, one could not doubt their military prowess – Emperor Keikō even had to dispatch an army to subdue them. In her translation of Fudoki, Michiko Yamaguchi Aoki translates the phrase “土蜘蛛八十女人” as “several female Tsuchikumo wizards”.<sup>403</sup> If one reads the original chronicle from the district Kishima, however, such interpretation could be taken as inaccurate, as in the said passage there is no mention of any religious or magical abilities possessed by those female warriors. Upon careful reading of the report on the whole province, however, one finds that some of these female tsuchigumo leaders had had other functions apart from the military leadership of their respective communities. According to the report from Saka district, for example, some female tsuchigumo seem to have had certain religious functions.

かはかみ あらぶるかみ ゆきき なかばをいかしなかばをころしき ここに あがたぬし あほあらた うらとひき  
 “此川上有荒神，往來之人，生半殺半。於茲，縣主等祖大荒田，占問。  
 つちぐもおほやまだめ さやまだめ をみな しもだのむら つち ひとがた うまがた  
 于時，有土蜘蛛大山田女、狹山田女，二女子云：「取下田村之土，作人形、馬形，  
 まつらば にきびなむ したがひ ことば うけ つひににきびき  
 祭祀此神，必有應和。」大荒田，即隨其辭祭此神，神歆此祭，遂應和之。”<sup>404</sup>

“[According to the latter theory, once upon a time a violent god who harassed passersby resided in the upper part of this river. The god [habitually] killed half of [the passersby] and spared half. Under these circumstances Ohoarata, the forebear of the agatanushi (local magistrate) of this area, asked two Tsuchikumo women named Ohoyamadame and Sayamadame to divine [the cause of the god's violence].

[After seeking the reason for the god's curse], the women reported to Ohoarata, saying, "If you take clay [obtained] in the village of Shimoda and make figurines of men and horses, and then dedicate them to this deity, it will be appeased."]<sup>405</sup>

As one can clearly see from that passage, some of the female tsuchigumo had magical abilities and could establish contact with the deities, which brought their functions much closer to those of shamanesses than to those of warriors. Interesting is the answer of the two women to how to appease the revengeful deity. For his curse to be lifted, the local magistrate had to make figurines of men and horses and dedicate them to the god. Further in the report, one can read that the deity accepted the

<sup>402</sup> 肥前國風土記 [Hizen no Kuni Fudoki], 杵嶋郡 [Kishima-gun]

<sup>403</sup> See Fudoki, transl. by Aoki 1997: 266

<sup>404</sup> 肥前國風土記 [Hizen no Kuni Fudoki], 佐嘉郡 [Saga-gun]

<sup>405</sup> Fudoki, transl. by Aoki 1997: 259

gift and was eventually appeased. The horse figurines and their connection with the local gods could be further proof of the theory discussed previously about foreign influence exerted on the indigenous Japanese population. As it was already mentioned, the horse and its introduction in the religious traditions of the early Japanese society could be regarded as a proof of North Asiatic influences on the archipelago. Furthermore, it could be assumed that the horse image and its interpretation in the indigenous Japanese religious world was not restricted only to some parts of the local cults. It had a universal meaning for all deities in the local religious pantheon. Even though the malevolent god was of water nature, the gift of a horse – a terrestrial animal – was sufficient to soothe his wrath.

Anyway, those reports prove that the local political structure of the early Japanese society could not be completely altered. Even after the male chieftains' authority continued to grow, in some regions, the females remained the undisputed religious and secular leaders of their respective societies. Further evidence of that theory could be found in Aoki's report about a discovery made in 1965 in northern Kyûshû, not far from Hakata. In the town Hirabaru, Fukuoka Prefecture, a massive burial mound was found which, it could be assumed, was built for a woman of extremely high status.

“Common objects such as bronze mirrors and swords were found outside the coffin, but their absence around the corpse within the coffin strongly indicates that this was a woman who had had a special role to play yet not belonged to the Tumuli cultural sphere. [...] This particular female corpse was surrounded by jewels of great value, nearly one thousand pieces in all. It is obvious that the female so buried was reverently regarded by her people and lavishly honored both in life and after her death.”<sup>406</sup>

As it becomes clear from that passage, the buried female was most likely a very influential one who didn't belong to a society ruled by male warriors. The absence of iron objects and the use of bronze weapons and mirrors shows that she wasn't revered as a warrior and the items in the tomb had only a ceremonial value. As she was put to rest in a burial mound, it is obvious that she had lived either in the Yayoi or in the Kofun period, a time in which the iron had already made its entrance into the archipelago. The lavish amount of jewels set beside her in the tomb should show not only her people's reverence for her but also her extremely high position in society. As all findings indicated that she hadn't been a warrior, the only other option was that she had been a shamaness, a person who functioned as mediator between her people and the world of the gods.

Another version of the reverence for a woman of high status could be found in another burial mound located to the east of the Ôsaka Bay. According to Aoki,

“Another Tumuli mound (ca. 300) located to the east of Osaka Bay yielded even more revealing evidence of female worship. There were three coffins found under this mound lying side by side. The middle one, the largest of the three, contained the remains of a richly dressed adult female who appeared to have been a shamanistic ruler of her people. The coffin on the east side encased an adult male skull among many funerary objects, such as iron swords, battle axes, an armor, a helmet, leather shields, and spears.

In contrast, the contents of the female's coffin included bronze mirrors, necklaces, bracelets, and the remnant of an object made of crystal. The most significant is this last item, which is believed to have been the handle of a decorated staff used in religious ceremonies. This object strongly suggests that the woman was a shamaness who had rules as queen. The third coffin,

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<sup>406</sup> Aoki 2015: 21

which was smaller than the other two and placed far apart from them, contained iron swords, arrowheads, armor, and a helmet, along with the remains of an adult male.”<sup>407</sup>

In the said example, the position of the female was further elevated, as a male was buried alongside her. Judging from the objects found in the coffins of the males, one could assume that their function had been that of guardians of the female, either during her lifetime, after her death, or both. It was possible that the first male whose coffin was alongside that of the female could have been her personal guardian. The second male’s role could have been that of a guard of both the male and female who ensured their safety in life and later, also in death. Another possibility is expressed by Aoki who argues that the male in the second coffin had probably been a co-ruler in charge of political affairs who could have died first and was buried in a temporal grave. After the death of the female ruler, only his head was removed and laid to rest beside her.<sup>408</sup> In such a case, the male in the third coffin should have been the guardian of both his ruler and co-ruler. Although the role of both males remains unclear, it is a fact that the buried female was a subject of reverence and respect. The objects found in her coffin suggest that she had a high religious position in her society. The presence of a decorated staff indicates not only important ritualistic functions but also high political authority, and could help for her acknowledgment as both the religious and political leader of her community.

In retrospect, the important role of the females in the early Japanese society did not vanish completely after the males’ function as both military and political chieftains was firmly established. In many communities in the early Yamato state, the religious role of the women was acknowledged to be more important than the political function of the men, which ensured the social superiority of the former over the latter. Later on, the meaning of that domination was further expanded as one could see the appearance of female rulers in the unified early Japanese state.

## Female shaman-rulers in the early Japanese society

It was mentioned in previous chapters that a woman named Himiko eventually managed to unify the rivaling small kingdoms and to set the beginning of the Yamatai state. The modern scholarship is unable to precisely identify Himiko even nowadays. As Barbara Ambros rightfully points out,

“Scholars tend to interpret the name Himiko as a title rather than a personal name. The Chinese may have tried to transliterate a title that resembled *hime-miko*, *hi-miko*, or *hi-meko* in Japanese. This implies that “Himiko” could have been referring to her royal lineage, her religious function as a shaman (*miko*), and/or her link to the cult of the sun (*hi*).”<sup>409</sup>

It seems that the assumption about Himiko having been a shaman is the closest to the truth. According to the Book of Wei, the queen practiced *kuei-tao* (*kidô*; 鬼道) which, among other variants such as “magic and sorcery”<sup>410</sup>, could also be translated as “the way of the souls [*of the deceased*]”. In that train of thought, the word could be interpreted as a reference to Himiko’s high religious position in the Japanese society. She probably was a shamaness whose function was to perform funeral rites for the deceased members of her community, thus practicing “the way of the souls”.

Upon careful observation of the social and religious idiosyncrasies of the peoples in continental Asia, it becomes clear that the shamanism was a focal point of every community. Now, what precisely is shamanism? Hori Ichirô offers his own definition of the term:

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<sup>407</sup> Aoki 2015: 21/22

<sup>408</sup> See Aoki 2015: 22

<sup>409</sup> Ambros 2015: 12/13

<sup>410</sup> See Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 13

“...shamanism, a term with a broad range of significations, is the general name given that magical, mystical, often esoteric phenomenon that has taken shape around the shaman, a person of unusual personality who has mastered archaic techniques of ecstasy (trance, rapture, separation of the soul from the body, etc.).

Originally, shamanism clearly depended on an animistic psychology, [...] Underlying this development was a primitive monotheistic idea, the idea of a supreme heavenly deity. On this basis, it may be surmised, the various tribal groups, each in its own way, shaped their theocratic institutions and myths, their symbols, world views, and ritual structures.”<sup>411</sup>

In Japan, tendencies of the animistic shamanism could not be seen in prehistoric times. According to the archaeological excavations, however, it is obvious that some shamanistic cult existed on the Japanese archipelago since the Jōmon period. Bronze bells from the Jōmon and Yayoi periods show depictions of shamans: “...a human figure with both arms raised above the head, a posture that could indicate ecstasy and/or dance.”<sup>412</sup> These depictions also suggest that the shamans were women (the appearance of a spindle) and that they “officiated” agricultural or hunting rites linked to fertility.<sup>413</sup> Further proof of the existence of shamanistic cults are the phallic objects scattered throughout the whole land. As one could surmise from the physical object of the cult, phallic stones, the belief was directed toward the reproduction, or precisely said, toward the male role in the wonder of birth. It could, therefore, be possible that the religious figures which “officiated” such a cult were mostly females. They could have functioned not only as titular religious figures but also as leaders in their respective communities. Later on, excavated haniwa from the Kofun period showed that shamanistic rituals were possibly linked to music and mirrors: “Female shamans are depicted wearing curved-bead necklaces, jingle-bell mirrors, and bells on crowns.”<sup>414</sup>

Anyway, another description of the term “shamanism” and the word “shaman”, that of Iva Lakić Parac, comes closer to Hori’s description of “archaic techniques of ecstasy” and thus to the politico-religious function of the women in early Japanese history:

“The word shaman originally belongs to the language of the Evenkis, the people from the east part of Siberia, and it represents a person (medium) who communicates with spirits (saman). [...] Shamanism implies believing in spirits who reside in different objects or natural occurrences. They are imagined as “human beings or persons” in a particular context. Spirits appear and manifest themselves in people’s dreams in an animal or bird form, as masked dancers, or are embodied in objects like talismans, trinkets, and similar figures. A shaman or a medium perpetuates a liaison between the world of people and the world of spirits, and the communication takes place when he enters different “alternative states of mind”, ecstatic states like trances, ecstasies or “out-of-body” experience.”<sup>415</sup>

That description is almost identical to the information given to the reader by The Book of Wei in regard to Himiko’s function in the newly founded state:

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<sup>411</sup> Hori 1975: 245

<sup>412</sup> Ambros 2015: 13

<sup>413</sup> See Ambros 2015: 13

<sup>414</sup> Ambros 2015: 13

<sup>415</sup> Parac 2015: 147

“...事鬼道，能惑衆，年已長大，無夫婿，有男弟佐治國。自爲王以來，少有見者。以婢千人自侍，唯有男子一人給飲食，傳辭出入。居處宮室樓觀，城柵嚴設，常有人持兵守衛。”<sup>416</sup>

*[She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance.]*<sup>417</sup>

As it could be surmised from the said narratives, the females have been strongly involved in the religious life of the society (described by the Chinese as “magic and sorcery”) and functioned as mediators between the community and the subject of the religious cult. Himiko’s seclusion in her palace underlines the fact that, for her, that religious function was primary. Namely that spiritual role won her the respect which she enjoyed as well as the title of “queen”. In the eyes of her subjects, Himiko’s seclusion in the palace displayed her close connection with the gods. It can be imagined that at some point she came to be identified with the gods whom she served. On the other hand, the males acted as co-rulers as they functioned as the living connection between the religious leader and the community. The Book of Wei does not specify the capacity in which Himiko’s younger brother “assisted her in ruling the country”. However, there are several theories in regard to the political and religious functions of men and women in the Yamatai society described in Wei zhi.

“...Takamura Itsue (1894 – 1964), argued that Himiko’s rule in conjunction with her younger brother was a remnant of an earlier, matriarchal system. Himiko as the female controlled the inner quarters and the spiritual world, while her brother as the male was in charge of communicating with the outside world and politics. [...] Yanagita Kunio (1875 – 1962) depicted women like Himiko, the later Ise priestesses, female spirit mediums, and other women in the employ of the early Yamato state as evidence for the spiritual monopoly women held in protohistoric and ancient Japan. In contrast, other scholars have regarded the hime-miko (female-male) system as an expression of the complementary balance between binary opposites akin to the relationship between the Chinese concepts of yin and yang. [...] Many modern scholars have assumed that Himiko wielded religious authority while her brother wielded political power. By contrast, the historian Yoshie Akiko argues that this notion arose only in the modern era, during a time when women were excluded from the political sphere.”<sup>418</sup>

While there is no firm evidence supporting any of the abovementioned theories, the possibility that at the time when the Yamatai kingdom was created, the social structure of the most powerful tribe was superimposed on the newfound state could not be excluded. If that had been the case, then Himiko, in her capacity as the religious figure of the said tribe, was naturally chosen as the ruler of the unified state. In that train of thought, the brother of the queen was revered as her second-in-command, as

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<sup>416</sup> 三國志 [Records of the Three Kingdoms], 魏書 [Book of Wei], Vol. 30: Biographies of the Wuhuan, Xianbei, and Dongyi

<sup>417</sup> Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 13

<sup>418</sup> Ambros 2015: 14/16

the person who would assist her in the government of the state. Considering that men were better acquainted with weapons and warfare, it could be assumed that Himiko's brother was responsible for the foreign affairs and the defence of the country, while the queen managed the internal affairs, with religion having also been among them.

Anyway, further evidence of the shamanistic role of the women in the prehistoric Japanese society could be found in Wei zhi's description of the circumstances around Himiko's successor, Iyo. According to The Book of Wei, she ascended the throne after the rule of a man whose failed politics led the state to ruination. Interesting is, however, the description of how she was chosen to become a ruler. According to the Chinese chronicle:

“太守王頎到官。倭女王卑彌呼與狗奴國男王卑彌弓呼素不和，遣倭載斯、烏越等詣郡說相攻擊狀。遣塞曹掾史張政等因齋詔書、黃幢，拜假難升米爲檄告喻之。卑彌呼以死，大作塚，徑百餘步，徇葬者奴婢百餘人。更立男王，國中不服，更相誅殺，當時殺千餘人。復立卑彌呼宗女壹與，年十三爲王，國中遂定。”<sup>419</sup>

*“[When Himiko passed away, a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter. Over a hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave. Then a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed; more than one thousand were thus slain. A relative of Himiko named Iyo [壹與], a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored.]”<sup>420</sup>*

Here, one sees a slight difference between the original Chinese text and the English translation. The Book of Wei doesn't mention any “relative of Himiko”. Instead, one finds the phrase “Himiko returned” [復立卑彌呼]. As it is clear that at the time when Iyo was chosen to ascend the throne Himiko was already dead and buried, one could surmise that the only way for her to “return” could have been through a shamanistic trance during which Iyo made a connection with Himiko's soul and was thus entrusted with the late queen's positions as a shamaness and a ruler. Such description of Iyo's ascension to the throne further emphasizes the mystical role of the female leaders in the early Japanese society. As one could understand from the information given to the reader by the Book of Wei, the societal order at the time was ruled by patriarchal norms according to which the males were those who in fact exercised political authority and effectively ruled the country. At the same time, the females were acknowledged as leaders only due to their close connection with the spiritual world.

The high religious authority held by women in the early Japanese society could be seen also in Nihonshoki's description of Empress Jingû (regent from 201 – 269 A.D.). Even though she acted only as a regent after her husband's (Emperor Chûai's) death, she is officially recognized as Japanese ruler and thus described in one of the earliest Japanese chronicles, a trait which distinguishes her from Himiko and Iyo. After an introduction of her personalia, her narrative begins as follows:

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<sup>419</sup> 三國志 [Records of the Three Kingdoms], 魏書 [Book of Wei], Vol. 30: Biographies of the Wuhuan, Xianbei, and Dongyi

<sup>420</sup> Records of the Three Kingdoms, Vol. 1 Book of Wei, transl. by Tsunoda 1951: 16



„三月壬申朔、皇后選吉日、入齋宮、親爲神主。則命武內宿禰令撫琴。喚中臣烏賊津使主、爲審神者。因以千繪高繪、置琴頭尾、而請曰、先日教天皇者誰神也。[···] 時得神語、隨教而祭。然後、遣吉備臣祖鴨別、令擊熊襲國。“<sup>421</sup>

„3rd month, 1st day. The Empress, having selected a lucky day, entered the Palace of worship, and discharged in person the office of priest. She commanded Takechi no Sukune to play on the lute, and the Nakatomi, Igatsu no Omi, was designated as Saniha. Then placing one thousand pieces of cloth, high pieces of cloth, on the top and bottom of the lute, she prayed [...] Now that the Divine words had been obtained, the Gods were worshipped in accordance with their instructions. Thereafter, Kamo no Wake, the ancestor of the Kibi no Omi, was sent to attack the Kumaso.“<sup>422</sup>

From that information, it could be surmised that the Empress' function was not much different from that of Himiko or Iyo described in the Book of Wei. As in Himiko's case, Jingû's first and foremost role was the spiritual guidance of the people through direct communication with the deities. Upon reading Nihonshoki's narrative, it could be assumed that the Empress practiced the so-called "mediated spirit possession" in which men by means of playing instruments helped women performing religious, or for that matter shamanistic, functions to enter a state of trance. Similar to Himiko, Jingû's direct contact with the gods led first to her military success and then to her acknowledgment as the de-facto ruler of the state. In Nihonshoki, her functions are described with the word *matsurigoto* which could be translated either as "government; political power" or as "worship; ritual". This phrasing indicates the close connection between governmental and religious power at the time and how the religious function of a person often led to his/her elevation to the highest political position in state. However, similar to the reigns of Himiko and Iyo, a big part of Empress Jingû's period as a regent is more or less shrouded in mystery. Nihonshoki's and Kojiki's narratives clarify that the Empress firstly subjugated the people of Kumaso and then turned her eyes toward the Korean peninsula.<sup>423</sup> Encouraged by the deities' divinations, she eventually crossed the sea with her army. The Korean king, terrified by the number of troops, surrendered to the Empress and vowed to become her vassal and to send regular tributes – slaves, horsecombs and whips.<sup>424</sup> In these narratives, it could be seen that a new characteristic was given to Empress Jingû – that of the shaman-warrior. She not only communicated with the deities but also personally engaged in battle.<sup>425</sup> In contrast to Himiko and Iyo who acted mainly as the spiritual connection between the deities and their respective societies, Empress Jingû embodied not only the role of a shamaness-ruler, respected due to her religious powers, but also that of the male co-ruler who was responsible for the military operations of the tribe/country.

Anyway, while the reliability of the sources which narrate the rules of women such as Himiko, Iyo and Jingû could be questioned (Ross Bender even describes Jingû's chronicle as a "remarkable fabrication"<sup>426</sup>), these reports doubtlessly achieve their main purpose: to show the earliest form of the

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<sup>421</sup> 日本書紀 [Nihonshoki], Chapter 9, 神功皇后 氣長足姬尊 [Jingû-kôgô Okinaga tarashi-hime no Mikoto]

<sup>422</sup> Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 225/226

<sup>423</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 226; Kojiki, transl. by Chamberlain 1882: 284

<sup>424</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 231/232

<sup>425</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 226

<sup>426</sup> „The Korean kingdoms did not exist as such in that century, and the peninsula was home to a number of chiefdoms. While there is historic and archeological evidence of early interactions between the archipelago and

Japanese political system in which the women, as the ones most closely connected with the world of the gods, were acknowledged as sovereigns due to their religious function.

## The women and their politico-religious role in the Asuka and Nara periods

Based on the information from the previous chapters, it could be assumed that in old times when a centralized Japanese state didn't exist yet, the women were regarded as the only ones able to establish contact with the spiritual world and to convey the wishes of the deities to the people. That belief didn't change after the foundation of the first unified Japanese state Yamatai, but rather became even stronger when shamanesses such as Queen Himiko or Iyo came to be revered as secular leaders of the state due to their spiritual abilities. Even later on, when female rulership was replaced with male military government and later centralized state under the rule of the emperor, the women retained their superiority in matters concerning religion. Of course, the sovereign functioned as the high priest of the indigenous beliefs of the people, but the females were still those considered to be able to directly communicate with the deities. An example of that is Empress Jingû who was revered as ruler of the state after the death of her husband simply due to her ability to communicate with and to read the signs of the deities. The same could be said on local level. While in the case of the Ise Shrine it was female members of the Imperial family – sisters, daughters, or aunts of the emperor, who were appointed as high priestesses to serve the Sun Goddess<sup>427</sup>, in other cases such as that of the Hachiman shrine at Usa, members of the families which had revered the said deity since times ancient retained their original function. There, it was the female members of the said families who served as main priestesses and thus conveyed the deity's wishes to the people, while the males, often relatives of the females, served as their helpers.<sup>428</sup> Both were regarded as "priests", but it was clear that the function of the women was more important than that of the men since the former were the only ones who could communicate with the deity. Such a model, albeit on a somewhat lower scale, could be regarded as a remnant from times ancient, as it resembled the division of authority during the reigns of the queens Himiko and Iyo when the men served as advisors<sup>429</sup>, but the women were the titular rulers who held power due to their religious function.

After the introduction of new philosophical and religious teachings such as Confucianism and Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, one could expect that the Japanese views in regard to the position of the women on the socio-political ladder would change for the worse. If one considers the fate of the first Buddhist nuns in Japan reported in Nihonshoki, that seems to have been the case. Apparently the daughter of Shiba Tattô had been the woman who set the beginning of the Japanese Buddhist clergy in 584.

"So the Oho-omi made him teacher, and caused him to receive Shima, the daughter of Shiba Tattô, into religion. She took the name of Nun Zen-shin [twelve years of age]. Moreover he received into religion two pupils of the Nun Zen-shin. One was Toyome, the daughter of Ayabito no Yaho. She took the name of Nun Sen-zô. The other was Ishime, daughter of Nishikori Tsubu. She took the name of Nun Kei-zen. Mûmako no Sukune, still in accordance with the Law of Buddha, revered the three nuns, and gave them to Hida no Atahe and Tattô,

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the peninsula, and the Wei Zhi itself describes some of the barbarian kingdoms in what became Korea, Jingû's tale is a remarkable fabrication.", Bender 2021: 12/13

<sup>427</sup> See Ooms 2016: 190/191

<sup>428</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 135

<sup>429</sup> See Yoshie 2013: 10

with orders to provide them with food and clothing. He erected a Buddhist Temple on the east side of his dwelling, in which he enshrined the stone image of Miroku. He insisted on the three nuns holding a general meeting to partake of maigre fare.”<sup>430</sup>

According to Barbara Ambros, the ordination of the three women (actually girls) is unique due to several factors. Firstly, according to Nihonshoki’s chronicle, at a vegetarian feast held for the nuns, Shimame’s father Shiba Tattô supposedly discovered a Buddhist relic.<sup>431</sup> While the veneration of relics had a long tradition in Buddhism as the late Buddha’s followers’ way to revere their teacher, in Japan “*the miraculous discovery and guardianship of Buddhist relics was frequently linked to women.*”<sup>432</sup> Apparently the relic found by Shiba Tattô at the feast held in honor of the three newly ordained nuns was the first recorded incident of this sort in Japan. Secondly, it is significant that the first ordained people in Japan had been women. According to Ambros, “*Their pioneering role in introducing Buddhism mirrored the powerful position that female shamans held in ancient Japan.*”<sup>433</sup> At the same time, however, it seems that the three women (girls) were given no choice in the situation. At the age of twelve, Shimame was too young to be able to make such an important decision by herself. Moreover, the word “*caused*” used in the Nihonshoki chronicle leads one to suspect that the three women (girls) were given no choice in the situation, they were instead ordained on Soga no Umako’s orders. As a further proof of that one could probably add the fact that two of the nuns were of immigrant origin (Zenshin and Senzô). Nihonshoki’s chronicles also show that the three nuns were not really respected as religious figures in the society. In an episode in the politico-religious conflict between Soga and Mononobe in which Moriya was able to burn Umako’s temple to the ground, the three women were defrocked, jailed and flogged.<sup>434</sup> According to Ambros,

“Flogging the nuns was likely considered particularly humiliating: an eighth-century code governing monks and nuns specified that monastics were usually punished by hard labor rather than by flagellation.”<sup>435</sup>

Thus, it could be assumed that the three nuns were not revered in a way similar to the shamanesses who communicated with the indigenous deities, they were rather seen as criminals.

Moreover, another proof of the uniqueness of the ordination of the three women (girls) is the fact that “*...this ordination did not follow the Buddhist monastic tradition’s orthodox guidelines.*”<sup>436</sup> On that, Barbara Ambros comments that

“...the nuns’ initial ordination was likely a novice ordination performed by a laicized monk. According to orthodox monastic regulations, the Vinaya, a quorum of ten monks and ten nuns was required for full female ordinations. By orthodox standards, the nuns were not fully ordained, especially because the person who ordained them had been previously defrocked.”<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 101

<sup>431</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 101

<sup>432</sup> Ambros 2015: 42

<sup>433</sup> Ambros 2015: 42

<sup>434</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 103

<sup>435</sup> Ambros 2015: 43

<sup>436</sup> Ambros 2015: 42

<sup>437</sup> Ambros 2015: 44

An interesting peculiarity which probably explains the understanding of Buddhism at the time is that the three nuns apparently didn't need much education or training<sup>438</sup> in order to perform their duties. As Barbara Ambros points out, they were "*just as a shrine priestess[es] [...] at a shrine*<sup>439</sup>". She further comments that

"...perhaps Buddhist ordination and devotion were viewed as resembling the kami worship rites (that is, rites for divinities) conducted by sacerdotal lineages, activities that were likewise transmitted within families."<sup>440</sup>

These first reports regarding the development of the politico-religious role of the women during the Asuka period show that the females continued to be regarded as people closely connected with religion, the deities in particular. From that point of view, it is no wonder that the first ordained Buddhist in the Yamato state had been a woman. Considering that Buddhism was still a young religion on the archipelago, it could be assumed that for the one family which supported it, the Soga, the teaching of Buddha seemed as a foreign form of the Japanese indigenous beliefs.<sup>441</sup> Thus, probably hoping to strengthen their own political position, they chose a woman to represent their "Buddhist" faith in a manner similar to the way in which the priestesses of the indigenous religion represented their communication with the kami.

Anyway, Buddhism was not the only innovation which entered the Yamato state in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. As it was already narrated in previous chapters, the attempts of rulers such as Suiko and, much later, Tenmu to naturalize Buddha's teaching and to utilize it in order to strengthen the Imperial authority led to the import of Chinese philosophies and schools of thought such as Confucianism and Taoism. As Barbara Ambros points out,

"Confucian thought assumed that society was based on five basic, mostly hierarchical relationships, including that between husband and wife, supposedly based on chaste conduct between the spouses and the wife's obedience to the husband."<sup>442</sup>

To be precise, however,

"Confucius had very little to say about the roles and expectations of women in the family or in society. Thus it was left for Confucian scholars to apply the principles enunciated by Confucius and Mencius to the task of prescribing expectations and behavioral norms for women in a Confucian family and a Confucian society. To these scholars also fell the task of justifying the

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<sup>438</sup> On that matter, a certain controversy could be found. The Nihonshoki chronicles from the reign of Emperor Sushun (Summer, 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month; 1<sup>st</sup> year, Spring, 3<sup>rd</sup> month; 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Spring, 3<sup>rd</sup> month; 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Autumn, 10<sup>th</sup> month) mention that Zenshin and the other nuns went to Paekche of their own volition in order to deepen their Buddhist studies. Their return apparently led the others, among them also Shiba Tattō's son and Zenshin's brother Tasuna, to take the Buddhist vows., See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 112/120

<sup>439</sup> Ambros 2015: 44

<sup>440</sup> Ambros 2015: 44

<sup>441</sup> On the matter of Soga no Iname's faith, for example, Kamstra comments that,

"Despite merely external discrepancies, the inherent function of the image as a pointer towards the Bodhi was not yet recognized. It remained no more than a new ujigami in which the abstract and impersonal powers of the ujigami had been reduced to more human proportions in the human shape of the image.

This mentality produced Iname's admonition to remain faithful to the ujigami. Therefore it did not as yet imply any renunciation of Buddhism. It merely shows that he had not yet recognized the real function of the image given to him.", Kamstra 1967: 338

<sup>442</sup> Ambros 2015: 23

education of women and the task of laying forth the parameters and techniques for the education of girls and women.”<sup>443</sup>

An important text for the education of young women in ancient China was the “Admonitions for Women” by Ban Zhao (49 – 120 A.D.), an aristocratic woman of the Later Han dynasty. In her work, she points out the four virtues which a female should possess:

“In womanly behavior there are four things [to be considered]: womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly appearance, and womanly work. To guard carefully her chastity, to control circumspectly her behavior, in every motion to exhibit modesty, and to model each act on the best usage: this may be called womanly virtue. To choose her words with care, to avoid vulgar language, to speak at appropriate times, and not to be offensive to others may be called womanly speech. To wash and scrub dirt and grime, to keep clothes and ornaments fresh and clean, to wash the head and bathe the body regularly, and to keep the person free from disgraceful filth may be called womanly appearance. With wholehearted devotion to sew and weave, not to love gossip and silly laughter, in cleanliness and order [to prepare] the wine and food for serving guests may be called womanly work.”<sup>444</sup>

Then, the most popular text in premodern China concerning the education of women “Analects for Women” was compiled by two sisters, Song Ruoshen and Song Ruo Zhao, daughters of a high-ranking Tang official in the eighth century. In their text, a point was made that the only way for a woman to establish herself as a person was for her to be chaste and pure.<sup>445</sup> Furthermore, a woman should wake up early, learn to do housework, to cook and to manage the household in order to be regarded as a worthwhile member of society.<sup>446</sup> Thus, even though Confucianism didn’t pay any special attention to the feminine part of society, later Confucian texts compiled by educated female aristocrats created a model which a woman had to follow in order for her to be regarded as a valuable member of the community. It was, therefore, the women who created rules for all females to follow. Those who did not abide by these guidelines were considered impure and lowly creatures who didn’t deserve to be a part of society.

Nevertheless, after their introduction in Yamato upon the compilation of Shôtoku Taishi’s Seventeen-Article Constitution in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Confucian concepts continued to find their way into the Japanese society. It seems that the teachings regarding women, albeit not originally prescribed by Confucius or Mencius, were also welcomed by the scholars of the island state.

“...in one of his poems included in the Manyôshû (ca. 759), Yamanoue Okura (660 – ca. 733) invokes the idea that a woman was supposed to obey the three major male figures in her life: her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after being widowed. He

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<sup>443</sup> Asia for Educators, Excerpts from Analects for Women by Song Ruo Zhao

<sup>444</sup> Analects for Women by Song Ruo Zhao, transl. by de Bary, Bloom 1999: 821/824

<sup>445</sup> “To be a woman, you must first learn how to establish yourself as a person. The way to do this is simply by working hard to establish one’s purity and chastity. By purity, one keeps one’s self undefiled; by chastity, one preserves one’s honor.

[...] When walking, don’t turn your head; when talking, don’t open your mouth wide; when sitting, don’t move your knees; when standing, don’t rustle your skirts; when happy, don’t exult with loud laughter; when angry, don’t raise your voice. The inner and outer quarters are each distinct; the sexes should be segregated. Don’t peer over the outer wall or go beyond the outer courtyard. If you have to go outside, cover your face; if you peep outside, conceal yourself as much as possible. Do not be on familiar terms with men outside the family; have nothing to do with women of bad character. Establish your proper self so as to become a [true] human being.”, Analects for Women by Song Ruo Zhao, transl. by de Bary, Bloom 1999: 827/831

<sup>446</sup> See Analects for Women by Song Ruo Zhao, transl. by de Bary, Bloom 1999: 827/831

also alludes to the concept of the four womanly virtues, mentioned in the Confucian classic the Book of Rites, and discussed at length by the female Confucian scholar Ban Zhao [...] in her primer Precepts for Women (Nü jie) [...].”<sup>447</sup>

What was important, however, was not the fact that these codes of conduct for women written by Confucian female scholars reached the Yamato state, but rather that these Confucian-based thoughts became the basis for the laws regarding family in the 8<sup>th</sup>-century legal codes (the Taihō Code from 702 and the Yōrō Code from 718). As Barbara Ambros points out,

“The codes constructed the family as a virilocal, patrilineal unit and encouraged filial piety as the foundation of the national social order. Penal law took gender differences for granted, making a wife’s offense against the husband’s parents a graver infraction than the husband’s offense against her parents. A husband’s physical violence against his wife was not punishable as long as he did not kill her, but if he assaulted her parents, this was ground for divorce. A husband had various reasons to divorce his wife: for example, if she spoke ill of her in-laws or attempted to harm them, or if he wished to divorce her based on seven conditions (failure to bear a son, adultery, failure to serve her in-laws, loquaciousness, jealousy, and severe illness). The wife, however, had no corresponding rights. A wife’s adultery was punishable, but no corresponding offense existed for the husband.”<sup>448</sup>

Interestingly enough, however, while the laws laid the legal basis for the conduct of women in society, several Japanese sources prove that the reality was different.

“...evidence from the very early Heian period (794 – 1185) suggests that Japanese women also seem to have held property individually, a practice contrasting with those prescribed by Chinese-style legal codes [...] Eighth-century texts such as regional gazetteers, the Kojiki, and the Manyōshū further suggest that women had considerable freedom to choose or reject their partners. [...] The Confucian concept of the Three Obediences (to father, husband, and son) likewise seems to have become a prevalent concept only by the late medieval period.”<sup>449</sup>

The presented information indicates that Confucianism’s entry into the Japanese society in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the promulgation of Confucian-based, or for that matter Chinese-based, laws could not alter the attitude toward the females in accordance with the continental concepts. The positions of men and women in society seemed to have been more or less equal, with the latter being free to make decisions for their own future.

Now, after seeing that Confucianism was not really able to harm the socio-political and religious position of the women in the early Japanese society, it ought to be explained whether the Japanese Buddhism was able to do it. Earlier in that chapter, it was discussed how the first ordained Buddhist nuns were accepted in the Asuka society. While both the ordination of the three girls and the attitude toward them thereafter could be attributed to the strained political climate in the country, the conflict between Soga and Mononobe in particular, not much could be discovered about how the actions of the three nuns were accepted by society and how their interactions with the people were assessed. Similarly, Nihonshoki’s chronicle in regard to the first ordained nuns in the Yamato state does little to clarify Buddhism’s general views on women and whether these notions were imported into Japan at all. Historically and ideologically speaking, none of Buddha’s teachings mentions the expectations set for the females in a Buddhist-influenced society. According to Diana Paul and Frances Wilson, in the

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<sup>447</sup> Ambros 2015: 23/24

<sup>448</sup> Ambros 2015: 24

<sup>449</sup> Ambros 2015: 24/25

Indian mythological tradition, the women are often portrayed in the dual role of evil and bloodthirsty creatures, and mother figures.

“In Indian mythology the representation of woman as evil is continued, but we have a more complex form of the myth of Eve. The dominant and invincible goddess is Devî, who slays the gargantuan buffalo in the Purânas. As the Hindu goddess Kâlî, she is fearsome and loathsome, depicted as an old hag with skull-laden necklaces, gluttonously drinking the blood of her victims; she functions more powerfully than an Eve-like mother of the human race. As Devî, she is the primeval force of the cosmos, the maternal power, which has a dualistic dimension of demonic and creative proportions. As the power of the universe, she may either bestow life or annihilate it. She may also be the life-giving force of fecundity as a positive energy.”<sup>450</sup>

Apparently the early Buddhist tradition inherited the Indian mythological structure.

“Buddhism inherited the Indian mythological structure in which tension existed between the maternal aspect and the destructive aspect explicitly illustrated by Kâlî. Whereas Kâlî represents both the maternal and destructive forces of the cosmos, the Buddhist representation of woman as evil is one traditional attitude, the woman as mother another.”<sup>451</sup>

The inability, or perhaps unwillingness, of Buddhism to accept the said duality resulted in the complete disregard for women’s role as mothers and in an emphasis on their portrayal as children of sin who evoke sin. As a result, in many scriptures, the females were portrayed as creatures with uncontrollable desires.<sup>452</sup>

“Traditional Buddhist attitudes toward woman as inferior reflect a view of woman as temptress or evil incarnate. The lustful woman is seen with unrestrained sensuality, perhaps irrevocably so. She has an animalistic nature associated with innate sexual drives not found in the nature of the male. [...] The example of woman as the embodiment of evil in Buddhist literature reflect: (1) the limitations of the human condition, which is a continual process of suffering and rebirth (samsara), frequently denoted by the feminine; and (2) the projection of masculine resentment denoted by the projection of the feminine onto women. [...] Woman represented limitations of human nature in much the same manner as Eve and Pandora, but woman glowed with a more intense sexual vitality and was the primeval force of fecundity, as she was in the Hindu religion. Unlike the Hindu Mother Goddess, however, the sexual energy was unequivocally repugnant in early Buddhist sects such as the Theravâdin sect. What was feminine or sensual was samsara, the world of bondage, suffering, and desire, which led to cycles of rebirths. This world of the feminine had to be vanquished at all costs.”<sup>453</sup>

Paul and Wilson maintain the view that the negative opinion on women could be attributed not only to the mythological background inherited from the Hinduist tradition but also to the “*tenacious masculine resentment in monastic Buddhism*.”<sup>454</sup> The earliest Buddhist community of monks, the samgha, would be then the source of that resentment.

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<sup>450</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 4/5

<sup>451</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 5

<sup>452</sup> According to Paul, non-Buddhist Indian texts emphasized that the sexual drives of the females are much stronger than those of the males. The reason was believed to be the portion of the Brahmanic god Indra’s excessive sexual energy which was supposedly inherited by the women., See Paul/Wilson 1985: 5

<sup>453</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 3/5

<sup>454</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 6

“The pragmatic objective of the monastic order was to maintain the organization while the religious objective was to achieve spiritual growth. Symbolically, woman represented the profane world, samsara. Perhaps more detrimentally, women were potential obstacles in actual life to man’s spiritual growth. The male novice left his wife and family for the order, and naturally at times he yearned to return to the company and security of his family. In fact, the woman as wife could pose a very real threat to the individual monk’s observance of celibacy. Moreover, for the organization’s perspective, the wife or lover was a powerful competitor for the member’s loyalty and support. While the Samgha could offer spiritual solace and salvation through self-discipline, the woman could offer sensual comfort and emotional support, alleviating loneliness and austerities.”<sup>455</sup>

The attitude toward the feminine part of society was further strained by the fact that monks had to roam the country in order to beg for alms. Since a housewife would often be the one giving money to the wandering brothers, it was highly likely that the latter considered themselves more or less dependent on the former. At the same time, the threat of the order’s punitive actions against misconduct always existed. That reality also didn’t contribute to a better look toward women in general. The Mahayana tradition was more sympathetic to the existential concerns of the monks, but, at the same time, a portion of anti-female views could also be found in its scriptures. Different texts focused on the portrayal of women as seductresses who tempt the monks and drag them down to degeneracy. Meditational practices against lustful thoughts were prescribed. In general, an image of the women as the “*antithesis of religion and morality*”<sup>456</sup> was gradually developed.

While there is no doubt that the abovementioned negative notions were brought to the Yamato state together with Buddhism, it remains unclear whether they had been adopted in the Japanese society at all. After all, the women were considered the pillar of the Japanese indigenous beliefs due to their abilities to communicate with the deities and to convey their wishes to the community. Moreover, as Lori Meeks points out,

“...few lay Buddhists in Japan would have studied “Buddhism” as a holistic tradition: most had been exposed only to a smattering of disparate texts and rituals, and few had attempted to read and understand the contents of Buddhist texts on their own. Japan had no centralized authority that dictated matters of doctrine. Knowledge of Buddhist texts was, on the whole, something transmitted via scholar-priests, who offered public lectures from time to time (some of which were later collected and transmitted in *setsuwa*, or short narrative, collections); explained Buddhist ideas through the explication of images (*etoki*); and sometimes, especially in the Kamakura period and later, exchanged letters with more educated lay followers. [...] For most laypeople, Buddhist practice had little, if anything, to do with the study of texts and doctrines. [...] And while many did learn how to recite certain Buddhist sutras, emphasis was typically placed on the spiritual merit earned through the act of chanting and not on the explication of textual content. [...]

It is fair to assume that certain basic Buddhist concepts – the notion that all living beings experience rebirth through the six paths (*rokudô*), the impermanence of all things (*mujô*), the compassion of the bodhisattvas, the desirability of avoiding hell and gaining rebirth in heavens or pure lands, the notion that spiritual merit can be created and transferred, and even more

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<sup>455</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 6

<sup>456</sup> Paul/Wilson 1985: 8



complex ideas, such as original enlightenment (*hongaku*) – had, by the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, become part of the basic cultural knowledge of the educated classes.”<sup>457</sup>

As Meeks points out, due to the lack of systematic approach in regard to the Buddhist scriptures and texts, the knowledge of the Buddhists in the Yamato state was incomplete and more practically- than theoretically-oriented. That peculiarity combined with the positive view on females in general contributed to the development of a certain Japanese Buddhist notion of the role of women in society. As a matter of fact, it seemed closely connected to the second part of their dual representation in the Indian mythology: that as mothers.

“After the arrival of Buddhism, women became symbols of Buddha’s boundless compassion, and motherly love was idealized. [...] Motherhood was the major reason for deferring to women, whose status was low in society. Buddhism often teaches the practice of altruistic love in terms of a mother’s love for her child:

As a mother at the risk of her life watches over her own child, her only child, so also let everyone cultivate a boundless (friendly) mind toward all beings.

Unlimited motherly love is embodied in the bodhisattva, who was believed to possess the power to save children destined to die. A mother’s milk symbolizes her love.”<sup>458</sup>

As Barbara Ambros points out, women were also allowed to serve as nuns and were accepted as equal to men. That much could be assumed upon seeing that in 718, the *Sōni ryō* (Regulations for Monks and Nuns) were promulgated. In it, the government stated its expectations for the attitude of male and female monastics. For example, the Regulations prohibited monks and nuns from engaging in prognostication, fortune-telling or healing through magical practices. They were not allowed to participate in games involving betting or gambling as well as to play music instruments. Moreover, the Regulations stated that monks and nuns were prohibited from residing in the same quarters and that neither male nor female monastics were allowed to enter a monastery or a nunnery without good reason.<sup>459</sup> While the *Sōni ryō* regulated the attitude of the lay Buddhists, it should be noted that they did not single out women in particular. On the contrary, male and female monastics were considered equal before the law.

Some evidence of the notion of the women’s equality in the Asuka and Nara periods could be found in the *setsuwa* collection *Nihon ryōiki* compiled by monk Kyōkai. In it, the author describes a variety of women: from high to low, from rich to poor, from rulers through nuns to wives. As Kyoko Motomichi Nakamura mentions in the preface of her translation of *Nihon ryōiki*:

“Thirty tales out of one hundred and sixteen feature heroines, and women appear in another ten. Nuns appear in six stories [...], and the remainder are devoted to lay women. As mentioned above, the legal system of the society was patrilineal, but social convention betrayed the persistence of the matrilineal tradition.”<sup>460</sup>

Nakamura explains that while monk Kyōkai received his Buddhist education through the scriptures of the Pure Land school of Buddhism according to which “...*the pure land is depicted as a land without any women*”<sup>461</sup>, he did not accept the views contained in them.

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<sup>457</sup> Meeks 2010: 15/16

<sup>458</sup> *Nihon ryōiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 75

<sup>459</sup> See *Yōrō Ritsuryō Sōniryō*, transl. by Piggott

<sup>460</sup> *Nihon ryōiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 69

<sup>461</sup> *Nihon ryōiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 71

“The women in the Nihon ryōiki convey a quite different impression. Generally Kyōkai not only depicts women as devout and compassionate, even capable of attaining enlightenment, but he also alters the meaning of the scriptural passages to fit his own purposes. [...] The Nihon ryōiki, instead of making negative statements about women, maintains the equality of men and women before dharma.”<sup>462</sup>

As it could be seen, even the male lay Buddhists did not share the notions taught by some Buddhist scriptures which depicted the women as inferior to the men. On the contrary, the views influenced by the indigenous beliefs of the people of the females as a focal point of kami energy, a bridge between the two worlds, were only expanded after the introduction of Buddhism. To the traditional notions was added also the portrayal of the females as mother figures, as devout and compassionate people who give and protect life.

In the final analysis it could be concluded that the import of new ideologies during the Asuka and Nara periods such as Confucianism and Buddhism did little to change the positive attitude of the Yamato society toward females. Notions such as the women’s pollution that made them ineligible to attain enlightenment, their inferiority to the men, or the Confucian-based Five Obstructions and Three Obediences<sup>463</sup>, albeit imported into the early Japanese state, were not widely and readily accepted. Thus, the women had a relative freedom to choose their own way of life. In case they decided to become Buddhist nuns, they could expect to be considered equals to their male counterparts not only before the law but also by the monks themselves. In society, the situation was not much different. The women were praised for their role as mothers: people who give and protect life. It could therefore be concluded that the early Japanese society remained almost unchanged in its attitude toward the females. As Barbara Ambros points out, these “...negative concepts [...] would become more important in the Heian and medieval periods”<sup>464</sup> as a result of political and ideological changes which would be discussed in the chapters to come. Now, after the attitude toward the more or less ordinary women in the early Japanese society was more or less explained, it would be interesting to see what role in society and politics did the female members of the Imperial family hold during the Asuka and Nara periods.

## General views on the female members of the Imperial family during the Asuka and Nara periods

As it was already explained, after the import of continental knowledge, ideologies and philosophies, and the gradual development of independent political and religious systems in the early Yamato state stemming therefrom, a change in certain indigenous notions and views was to be expected. While the previous chapter proved that the Confucian teachings and the Buddhist scriptures that stigmatized the women as inferior to the men did not find fertile ground in the Asuka and Nara societies, such seemed to not have been the case with the female members of the Imperial family.

A position often assumed by Imperial princesses with no prospects of becoming directly involved in the government of the country (as spouses of the emperor or as sitting sovereigns) was that of high priestess at Ise. According to Nihonshoki, the office was established during the reign of Emperor Suinin (r. 29 B.C. – 70)<sup>465</sup> and Imperial princesses were appointed to serve the Sun Goddess since the reign of

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<sup>462</sup> Nihon ryōiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 71/72

<sup>463</sup> For more information on the matter see Andreeva, Anna, Childbirth in aristocratic households of Heian Japan; Kurihara, Toshie, A History of Women in Japanese Buddhism: Nichiren’s Perspectives on the Enlightenment of Women.

<sup>464</sup> Ambros 2015: 55

<sup>465</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.1, transl. by Aston 1896: 165/187

Emperor Keikō (r. 71 – 130) up until the rule of Emperor Yōmei (585 – 587). At first, the saiō (or, saigū) was thought to be just an "imperial ambassador" to the shrine and therefore didn't stay there for a long time: for example, there were cases in which a couple of saiō were appointed during the reign of a single emperor.<sup>466</sup> However, after Emperor Tenmu enacted the politico-religious changes in regard to Buddhism and Shintō, the position of high priestess at Ise became one of utmost importance for the Imperial family. As Barbara Ambross explains,

“The priestess – either a young, unmarried daughter of the emperor or, if he had none, one of his nieces – was supposed to serve as the royal liaison between the emperor and his divine ancestor on whom his sacral authority was based.”<sup>467</sup>

From the passage above it could be concluded that Tenmu's decision to revive the office of high priestess at Ise was based on his intention to strengthen his own authority rather than his reverence for the ancestor deity Amaterasu. Another proof of that could be found in Sakurada Marie's essay “未婚の女帝と皇位継承: 元正・孝謙天皇をめぐる” [Unmarried Female Rulers and Imperial Succession in Ancient Japan: With Special Attention to the emperors Genshō and Kōken]. According to her, after their appointment as high priestesses at Ise, all Imperial Princesses were elevated to second rank.<sup>468</sup> Thus, the position was respected as the third most important in state, staying behind only after the emperor and the Crown Prince. Considering the political importance which the position held, it should be no wonder that Emperor Tenmu decided to install his daughter Princess Ōku at the Ise Shrine as the first saiō to serve there after a long hiatus in the practice. Nevertheless, although it could be argued that for Tenmu the position of high priestess at Ise held more a political than a religious importance, there were still strict regulations and procedures which had to be observed by the woman appointed to serve the Sun Goddess before (and after) the beginning of her tenure. According to Engi Shiki (“Regulations of the Laws in the Engi era” compiled between 907 and 927), she had to reside in seclusion for one year first at the Imperial palace and then for another year at the so-called No-no-miya (the edifice built especially for the princess in her preparation for sacred duties). Before her departure for Ise, the princess had to go to the river to be purified and lustrated on a specially chosen auspicious day. Moreover, there were several taboo words for her (all in reference to Buddhism).<sup>469</sup> Additionally, during her time in office, the high priestess at Ise had to avoid sexuality and contact with death, otherwise she would have been considered ineligible to serve the Sun Goddess. After the end of her tenure, the Imperial princess was free to take a husband if she was still young enough to do that. Unfortunately for Emperor Tenmu's daughter, she could not complete her full service at Ise due to the execution of her brother Prince Ōtsu on accusation of treason. As a result, she was considered impure and dismissed. After her return to the capital, the princess didn't marry but found solace in composing waka for her dead brother.<sup>470</sup>

In toto, Princess Ōku's case was one of the first examples of the changed position of the female members of the Imperial House after the enactment of the political and religious changes set in motion by Emperor Tenmu. According to Sakurada Marie, the appointment of Tenmu's daughter as a high priestess at Ise set the beginning of a tradition typical of the eighth-century Japan. The author argues that almost all Imperial Princesses during that period either married or assumed the office of saiō, with the only exceptions having been the princesses Hidaka and Abe, later the emperors Genshō and

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<sup>466</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 56

<sup>467</sup> Ambros 2015: 37

<sup>468</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 57

<sup>469</sup> See 延喜式 [Engi Shiki] Book 5; Bock 1970-72: Book 5

<sup>470</sup> See Takagi 2018: 115; 117/122

Kôken/Shôtoku, respectively.<sup>471</sup> While the office of high priestess at Ise definitely held political connotations, it could not be argued that the woman appointed to the position was still respected as the person who served the Sun Goddess for the prosperity of the nation. On the other hand, the marriage of an Imperial Princess was always decided on with thoughts of the potential political merits for the emperor. While the main purpose of such a marriage was to prevent political status and property diffusing outside the male line of the Imperial House, it also contributed to the birth of potential successors for the throne connected by blood to the ruling sovereign, or branch of the Imperial family.<sup>472</sup> The best example of that second purpose could be seen upon examining the succession of the throne after the death of Prince Kusakabe, the son of the emperors Tenmu and Jitô. After his death, almost all Crown Princes ascended the throne with the idea of continuing the “Kusakabe line” rather than the Imperial line. While that concept encompassed the father-son succession within the Imperial line, its downside was that it relied on the so-called dual-system according to which royal princesses were married off to Imperial descendants<sup>473</sup> to support and continue it. Thus, if a prince whose mother had been a royal princess was too young to be enthroned, his father would succeed to the throne before him. The spouse of the royal princess was therefore accepted into the Kusakabe line as a quasi-successor.<sup>474</sup> That system was further supported by legends and myths. According to one such story, after Prince Kusakabe’s death in 689, a certain black sword (supposedly the Prince’s) was given to Fujiwara no Fuhito who acted as the weapon’s guardian. Fuhito handed it over to Emperor Monmu at his enthronement ceremony and after the sovereign’s death the sword returned in the courtier’s hands. After the death of the minister, the weapon was handed down to Emperor Shômu. The fact that swords not only were believed to repel bad spirits and intentions but also held significance for the acknowledgment of the social and political position of their holders speaks of a deeper meaning hidden behind Kusakabe’s memento and it having been handed down to the new sovereign.<sup>475</sup> Considering that the weapon was presented to its holder on the day of the latter’s enthronement ceremony as well as that, after Fuhito’s death, the sword was not handed over to Emperor Genshō but to the crown prince who later became Emperor Shômu, it could be assumed that the inheritance of the sword symbolized the succession of the throne by the male line, that is the direct descendants of Prince Kusakabe.

Although the legend clearly promotes the notion that women could not be recognized as equal to men in matters regarding the succession, sometimes there were outer factors which impeded the enthronement of a male heir apparent. One such hindrance, for example, was the age of the successor. According to the existing Imperial law in the eighth century, one couldn’t ascend the throne without one’s coming-of-age ceremony or until one reached at least the age of 40.<sup>476</sup> From that point of view, the ascension of Imperial Princesses such as Hidaka and Abe could be easily understood – they were regarded as throneholders until their respective Crown Princes became able to fulfill their duties as sitting sovereigns. All things considered, one could say that the main purpose of the princesses from the Kusakabe line was that of “guardians of the throne” – either through marriage or through (temporary) ascension to the throne. In the cases of the Imperial Princesses Hidaka (Genshō) and Abe (Kôken/Shôtoku), it could be speculated that the two were not needed in their capacity of “guardians of the Kusakabe line” by the means of marriage, so they remained single throughout their lives<sup>477</sup>, a

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<sup>471</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 56

<sup>472</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 56/57

<sup>473</sup> „...according to the Keishiryô, Imperial Princesses could marry up to 5<sup>th</sup>-generation Imperial descendants from their immediate circle.”, Sakurada 2016: 56

<sup>474</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 58/61

<sup>475</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 54/55

<sup>476</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 55

<sup>477</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 56

destiny which resulted in the negative opinion toward the female emperors in general, a peculiarity which would be explained in the following chapters.

Even though the Imperial Princesses seemingly had a strictly defined role in the Asuka and Nara periods which, albeit politically involved, did never demand their active participation in politics, it is highly controversial and somewhat ironical that the majority of the female members of the Imperial family who eventually ascended the throne to rule as emperors was concentrated in those two eras. According to Ueda Masaaki, these female sovereigns were the third, and also the last, stage of the societal development of women in the Yamato state (the other two having been the shamaness-ruler period and the transition period from shamaness-ruler to female emperor).<sup>478</sup> The activities of these 3<sup>rd</sup>-stage female rulers differed from those of shamaness-rulers such as Himiko or Iyo, or from shamaness-warriors like Jingû. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the female sovereigns (or for that matter spouses of the emperor) never forgot their close connection to religion. The Asuka period saw the development of the tendency of female monarchs being or becoming sponsors of Buddhism. As it was shortly mentioned previously, in 606, Emperor Suiko ordered Shôtoku Taishi to make the public lectures on the Buddhist sutras “The Lion Roar of Queen Shrimala” (“Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra”) and “Lotus Sutra” (“Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra”).<sup>479</sup> To those two, Barbara Ambros adds also the Vimalakīrti Sutra.<sup>480</sup> As Ambros points out, all three texts contained teachings on the ideal roles of women in Buddhism. It was already mentioned that Emperor Suiko’s decision to utilize the teaching of Buddha as a means to strengthen her own position was probably influenced by her intention to present both Buddhism and the indigenous beliefs of the people as equally important pillars of support for her authority. Barbara Ambros’ analysis of the emperor’s choice, however, offers a slightly different point of view on the matter.

“The Queen Śrīmālā Sutra’s depiction of a woman as a wise and capable leader lay have held particular appeal to Suiko. [...] Likewise, the Vimalakīrti Sutra denied the essential gender differences between men and women. [...] The Lotus Sutra could also have appealed to Suiko for its relatively inclusive, though not ambivalent, attitude toward women... [...] Ultimately, the Lotus Sutra did assure women of their potential for Buddhahood despite recognizing the physical limitations of their bodies. That teaching could have made the text an important conceptual tool for Suiko.”<sup>481</sup>

According to Ambros’ analysis of the contents of the three sutras, it seems that Emperor Suiko not only tried to utilize Buddhism as a means to strengthen her Imperial authority, she also used Buddhist scriptures in order to seek legitimacy. While the previous chapter clarified that the attitude toward the ordinary women in society remained more or less unchanged after the import of Buddhism, Ambros’ presentation of the content of the three sutras draws a slightly different picture in regard to the socio-political and religious position of the females in the Yamato political world. It seems that Emperor Suiko was underestimated by her courtiers due to her gender. Therefore, by utilizing the said sutras and ordering her Crown Prince (a man) to write commentaries on them, she wanted to strengthen her claim to the throne, to prove that she was equal to her male counterparts in matters regarding the government of the state. It seems that the rule of Emperor Suiko set the beginning of a tendency which reached its peak during the reign of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku: the female rulers were regarded as

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<sup>478</sup> Ueda 1996: 5

<sup>479</sup> Lepekhova 2016: 54/55

<sup>480</sup> See Ambros 2015: 46

<sup>481</sup> Ambros 2015: 46/47/48

inferior to the male sovereigns. As a result, they had to always prove themselves and to seek legitimacy by utilizing different religious or political tools.

Then, another notable Buddhist patron was the mother of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, Empress Kômyôshi. As Ambros explains,

“Empress Kômyô’s household included offices for craftsmen trained in the construction of temples and the sculpting of Buddhist images, as well as for scribes employed to copy Buddhist scriptures. She engaged in charitable works, such as dispensing medicine to the destitute, that were inspired by the ideals of the Vimalakirtî Sutra. Kômyô is also credited with the establishment of the nunnery Hokkeji<sup>[482]</sup> at the site of her father’s mansion. Most importantly, Kômyô is thought to have played a vital role in the founding of Tôdaiji, the “Eastern Great Temple” in Nara, and the provincial temple system that included both monasteries and nunneries.”<sup>483</sup>

While Empress Kômyô’s support for Buddhism could be attributed to her genuine faith, not the same could be said about another powerful patron of Buddhism: her daughter Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Her religious devotion, however, would be discussed in chapters to come as a part of her apparatus to seek legitimacy and to strengthen her authority.

In her essay “Women in the Nihon Shoki”, Gina Barnes classifies the functions of the women portrayed in Nihonshoki, that is, those related to the Imperial family who were directly involved in the government of the state, into the following categories:

“Mates (wives, consorts and concubines); Mothers, a role that usually follows from being Mates; Mystics (including native seers and appointed shrine priestesses); Militarists (both militant females and rulers despatching armies); Monarchs (both ancient chieftains and ruling empresses); Maids (a large category of serving women); Manufacturers (skilled in handicrafts); Messengers (evolving from Mystics); and Managers (as Mates became responsible for imperial households).

Some of these women had further minor functions attached to them. For example, 'Mates' often fulfill the secondary roles of hostess and confidant; they can also be militant in terms of wreaking vengeance on their spouses or others. The function of Managers is usually dependent on fulfilling other functions first. Often it is difficult to decide the main category to which a particular woman should be assigned: not only are women often multifunctional, but categories overlap as well.”<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> In her book “Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan”, Lori R. Meeks narrates the immense respect and reverence with which the nuns at Hokkeji remembered the founder of their convent:

“...the entire narrative [*Hokke metsuzaiji engi*, 142a] focuses on Kômyô: not only is the story about an image of Kannon that serves as a surrogate of Kômyô herself, but it climaxes when Kômyô delivers an oracle through the nun Zuikyô, thereby making her will known. Hokkeji’s revival is remembered here not in terms of doctrinal or institutional accomplishments [...] Instead, it is remembered in terms of how Kômyô, a historical figure from the distant past who had taken on mythical status, remained a spiritual force in the history of the ancient Nara capital, weeping when her convent Hokkeji fell into a state of disrepair and using visions and possession to urge living beings to care for the convent in the way that she desired.”, Meeks 2010: 53

<sup>483</sup> Ambros 2015: 48

<sup>484</sup> Barnes 2006: 5/6

Based on that categorization, it could be concluded that the female emperors were in the most cases mates (as they succeeded their husbands on the throne), mothers, monarchs and managers. As monarchs, these women received all tributes from the people as well as from the foreign embassies. They had the power to decide on punishments and politics, and to determine their successor. The function of manager explained by Barnes could be somewhat expanded, as the female sovereigns remained responsible for the Imperial Household even after their own enthronement. In those cases, they had to find the proper balance at court in order for them to be able to run the state affairs properly. In contrast to rulers such as Himiko, Iyo or Jingû, the female emperors after them were neither mystics nor militarists in the literal meaning of it. The closest link to being mystics was their function as high priestess of the indigenous beliefs of the people and their performance of certain ceremonies, but there is no mention in any historical text that they conveyed messages from deities or made any connection with the kami realm. They also were no militarists, since they didn't take part in any military campaigns in a manner similar to that of Empress Jingû.

Another classification of the female sovereigns is made by Kan Eishi in his book “日本の女帝 皇位継承の謎を探る” [The Female Emperors of Japan: Exploring the Mystery of the Imperial Succession]. According to him, the ancient female rulers could be divided into three categories according to their social and political standing prior to their ascension. Firstly, they had been Crown Princes (among the eight female rulers in the Imperial line of Japan such was the case only with Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku). Secondly, they had been empresses, that is spouses of the emperor (into that category fall the emperors Suiko, Kôgyoku/Saimei and Jitô). Thirdly, they had been Imperial Princesses (Genmei and Genshō).<sup>485</sup> From that classification, it becomes obvious that all female rulers had a very close connection with the Imperial House and the emperor prior to their ascension. For one to become Crown Prince regardless of their gender, they should have been related to the sitting ruler by blood. They could have been either his children, nephews or children of the previous emperor. In Kôken/Shôtoku's case, she was the daughter of Emperor Shômu who elevated her to the position during his reign. As the history later showed, until modern times she remains the only female Crown Prince who also ascended the throne. Namely that honor, however, deprived her of the possibility of ever marrying and having children of her own, a fact which will be discussed in detail in the chapters to come. On the other end of the axis stood the female rulers from the second category, that of the empresses-turned-emperors. Even though in most cases they had been Imperial Princesses before their marriage, these women had never been appointed to the position of Crown Prince with the prospect of succeeding the sitting sovereign. Instead, as was the case with all three of the female rulers falling into that category, they became emperors after the death of their Imperial spouses, at a time when the political situation was unstable. Thus, they had the rather difficult task to find the balance between all powers at court and to lead the state out of the impending political crisis. Of course, this doesn't mean that the emperors Suiko, Kôgyoku/Saimei and Jitô were not sovereigns in their own right. They were rightfully chosen and designated as rulers and it was they who had to bear the responsibility of the state and its people. They had to make all the important political decisions and to welcome embassies from foreign countries. In contrast to Kôken/Shôtoku, however, they had enough time to learn from their husbands before their ascension to the throne, thus honing their own political skills, a luxury which Kôken didn't have during her first reign, as she had been only reluctantly appointed Crown Prince and was not given the opportunity to learn at leisure due to the opposition of the courtiers. The third category female rulers, that of the Imperial Princesses, had a somewhat middle position between the Crown Prince and the Empress (or, Imperial widow). Even though they were never officially put in a position to claim the throne for themselves, the Imperial Princesses had

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<sup>485</sup> See Kan 2002: 24

received an education which more or less prepared them for the responsibility of being a ruler. In the case of Genmei, she had been the wife of Crown Prince Kusakabe, son of the emperors Tenmu and Jitô. Thus, she was destined to later become an empress, a spouse of the emperor. Only the untimely death of her husband made those prospects impossible. In the case of Emperor Genshō, she was the daughter of Genmei and was elevated to the position by her mother. Thus, it could be assumed that she had also received an education which prepared her for the task. Genshō also had the chance to see her mother in action and to learn from her how to manage the state affairs.

According to Kan, all female rulers of the Asuka and Nara periods had certain similarities between them. For example, except Jitô, all other female sovereigns didn't ascend the throne with the initial thought of wanting to become emperors.<sup>486</sup> Such an assumption could well be exaggerated. The most striking example of the opposite is Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. Even though there is no written evidence that she wanted the throne for herself, she performed all duties of a Crown Prince so thoroughly that it is hardly possible to assume that she didn't want to ascend and to rule in her own right. Moreover, in one of her edicts as Retired Emperor, she expressed the opinion that

“According to the words of Our revered mother the Dowager Empress Kōmyō, what she announced to Us was that ‘The line of imperial descendants of the Emperor who ruled the Realm at Oka no Miya, Prince Kusakabe, should remain unbroken. To avoid breaking this line you, even though a young woman, should succeed to Shōmu Tennō.’”<sup>487</sup>

In the said edict which would be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapters, the emperor explicitly points out that one could not let the line of Prince Kusakabe be broken. Therefore, it could be assumed that she considered it her duty to accept the throne.

In the case of Jitô, it could be argued whether she “wanted” to be enthroned (as per Kan), or if she simply wanted to protect her own son's (or for that matter her son's descendant's) right of succession. Before her official enthronement as an emperor, there was a long period during which she took care of the state matters in her capacity as Empress Dowager<sup>488</sup>. Therefore, it could be assumed that Jitô had been in no hurry to become a sitting sovereign. Due to her having been respected from all courtiers and to her vast knowledge on political and diplomatic matters, there weren't any objections from the court for her to act as an emperor despite her being only an Empress Dowager. Therefore, there had not been any need for Jitô to even ascend the throne. The situation would have been completely different, however, if she wanted to protect the throne for her own son, or for that matter her grandson. All things considered, however, her attitude could not be described as that of a “woman who wanted to ascend the throne”. Rather, Jitô was a caring mother who made anything possible to protect her child and to ensure his future, and, by extension, that of his descendants.

According to Kan, not all female rulers ascended the throne with the belief that they would remain on it their whole life.<sup>489</sup> That could be true, as some of those female rulers (for example, Jitô, Genmei and Genshō) clearly showed their desire to hand down the throne to male members of the Imperial family: Crown Prince Kusakabe and Obito (later Emperor Shōmu), respectively. In the cases of Suiko, Kōgyoku/Saimei and Kōken/Shōtoku, it so happened that they remained on the throne until their deaths.

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<sup>486</sup> Kan 2002: 24

<sup>487</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 44

<sup>488</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 363, 395

<sup>489</sup> See Kan 2002: 24



As it was already briefly mentioned, an interesting phenomenon in regard to the female rulers of Japan is that the majority of them ruled during the Asuka and Nara periods. As Kan Eishi explains, even though there were also two female rulers during the Edo period (1603 – 1868), their enthronement could be regarded as something temporary or extraordinary, considering the political circumstances of the era in which it occurred. At the same time, the high concentration of women who regularly ascended the throne could be seen only in the Asuka and Nara periods.<sup>490</sup> Kan argues that until the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century there were political, social and cultural transformations undergoing within the Japanese state which were neither temporary nor could take place hastily. At such times, it was the women who were able to find the balance and to stabilize the country, thus making the implementation of the reforms much easier and smoother.<sup>491</sup> Such had been the case, for example, with Emperor Suiko who had the difficult task to find the place of the Yamato ruler between Buddhism and the indigenous beliefs of the people, as well as to soothe the political wounds which were opened after the conflict between Soga and Mononobe. Another example had been the reign of Kôgyoku/Saimei when the sovereign had to guard the Imperial authority against Soga no Iruka's ambitions during her first reign, and soothe the aftershocks after the initial implementation of the Taika reform during her second term. The two reigns of Kôken/Shôtoku were also filled with discontent and turmoil at court which she had to overcome. As the emperors Tenmu and Shômu had begun to incorporate more and more elements of Buddhism, and for that matter other continental philosophies, into the indigenous beliefs of the people and vice versa, it was eventually Kôken/Shôtoku's task to find the most suitable use for all the newly introduced ceremonies and rituals.

All things considered, however, probably the most notable phenomenon in regard to the female rulers of the Yamato state is not that the majority of them was concentrated in the Asuka and Nara periods but rather that since the end of Emperor Shôtoku's reign in 770 until the Edo period (1603 – 1868), there had not been a single woman who had been enthroned. The exceptions were the emperors Meishô (r. 1629 – 1643) and Go-Sakuramachi (r. 1762 – 1771) who, as it was mentioned, didn't hold any real authority due to the specific political circumstances during that period in Japanese history. Thus, it could be assumed that the last female emperor who held the reins of political and religious power in the country was Kôken/Shôtoku. She was also the first and, so far, the last woman to be appointed to the position of Crown Prince and to ascend the throne in her own right. Thus, the most politically recognized female ruler remained the last sovereign with an actual power among all eight female emperors. To make things worse, some modern scholars express the opinion that it was mainly Kôken/Shôtoku's fault that women had been excluded from the Imperial order of succession.<sup>492</sup> In the next chapter, the possible reasons for such accusations would be discussed. Based on the analysis of old and newer sources, the answer to the question "Why the last female ruler of Nara Japan is portrayed in a negative or positive way?" would be found.

## PORTRAYAL OF KÔKEN/SHÔTOKU-TENNÔ IN OLD SOURCES AND MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, it was Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, the last female ruler of ancient Japan, who was often portrayed as the (in)direct reason for the exclusion of women from the order of succession in the Imperial House of Japan. For better understanding of those accusations, however, the known facts about that female ruler should be analyzed without any prejudice or bias. How could it be that the only female ruler who had also been the only female member of the Imperial

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<sup>490</sup> See Kan 2002: 24

<sup>491</sup> See Kan 2002: 25

<sup>492</sup> See Piggott 2003: 47

House to be appointed to the position of Crown Prince could eventually become the reason for the negative opinion toward the possibility of women sitting on the Chrysanthemum Throne in general?

The rationale behind the negative view on a certain topic is often more deeply rooted than one could imagine. In general, the arguments revolve around the first reign of the last female ruler of Nara Japan from 749 to 758 during which the young and inexperienced emperor was often supervised by her mother Empress Dowager Komyōshi and her Fujiwara kin; then comes the emperor's reascension to the throne in 764 and her attitude toward Emperor Junnin; and last but not least comes Emperor Shōtoku's relationship with the Buddhist monk Dōkyō, the latter's rapid rise to political power and eventually his unsuccessful bid for the throne. In many Western studies as well as in some Japanese literary sources, one finds at least one of those three arguments<sup>493</sup>, if not all three, as an excuse for the negative opinion toward the last female emperor of Nara Japan. Upon careful examination of those texts, however, one comes to the realization that the authors' views expressed there are based not on a thorough analysis of the facts found in various sources, but only on (one of the) publicly well-known narratives (or even only their translations) such as *Shoku Nihongi*. In other cases, the general view that "all female rulers of Japan were puppets and throneholders" is superimposed on all eight female emperors regardless of the facts narrated in the old Japanese histories.<sup>494</sup> Therefore, the following chapter will be dedicated to the full analysis of the life and two reigns of the last female emperor of Nara Japan based on the descriptions found in known and not so well-known Japanese sources compiled in different historical periods. Only after careful examination of the narratives in those texts could the dominating views toward that female ruler be assessed as true or false.

If one is to strictly follow the guidances set by Droysen in his "interpretational steps" for analysis of historical texts, it should be noted that the most important third step relies on a combination of four closely interconnected points, the most important among them being the "interpretation of the conditions" and the "psychological interpretation" which depend on outer factors such as time, circumstances, political or religious situation, and a person's psychological state in order for one to correctly assess the reason and the purpose for the compilation of a certain text.<sup>495</sup> The same could be said about the "psychological" method used for the analysis of a discourse presented by Michel Foucault. According to the author, by utilizing the said method, one could show how a certain person was or was not as the initial reading of a text portrays him or her.<sup>496</sup> A similar strategy could be applied to the analysis of Kōken/Shōtoku's portrayal in different sources. It should, and could, not be expected that the sentiment toward her in all chronicles would be positive because of the difference in the political and religious circumstances in Japan at the time of the said texts' compilation. As a result, the abovementioned factors had inevitably left their trace on the authors' inner convictions. From that point of view, it would be difficult to assess the portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan by following the traditional scheme of first introducing her biography and then commenting on the facts by using the historical chronicles or the belletristic texts, thus trying to understand the reasoning behind the narratives. A much more productive strategy would be the analysis of Kōken/Shōtoku's portrayal during every single epoch of Japanese history, beginning with the Nara period up until the modern times. Only then would it be possible to see if the general impression of the last female emperor of Nara Japan was bad from the beginning or it has changed at a certain point of time.

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<sup>493</sup> See Pigott 2003: 47; Pauly 2007: 20/25; Bender (b) 2010: 238

<sup>494</sup> See Kan 2002: 24/27

<sup>495</sup> See Jordan 2018: 49

<sup>496</sup> See Gutting 1989: 134/134

## Nara Period

### Political situation in the middle/late Nara Period

#### The rise of the Fujiwara

The Nara period could be best described as the era in which important historical chronicles such as *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* were compiled, as the epoch during which three female emperors ascended the throne, with one of them even reigning two times, as well as the time in which the Fujiwara family began its conquest of power. The last fact turned out to be of a crucial importance not only for that particular period of Japanese history but also for centuries to come, since after their recognition and rise to power during Emperor Tenji's reign (r. 661 – 672), the Fujiwara established themselves as a family of throne-makers and throne-guardians, a strategy which reached its peak during the following Heian period (794 – 1185) and thus influenced immensely the future of the Imperial institution. The first Fujiwara was a certain Nakatomi no Kamatari, a courtier who helped Prince Naka no Ôe (the future Emperor Tenji) to overthrow the powerful Soga family. Shortly before Kamatari's death, he was given the family name Fujiwara by the emperor himself.<sup>497</sup> Therefore, it could freely be assumed that the first person who actively used the name Fujiwara was Kamatari's son, Fuhito. Namely under the leadership of the latter did the Fujiwara family reach the first pinnacle of their political power and influence.

In 669, the year of Kamatari's death, his son Fuhito was a ten-year-old boy and it is notable that he was not even the eldest son in the family. Some authors, such as Richard Ponsonby-Fane, even question Kamatari's paternity.<sup>498</sup> Nevertheless, despite the lack of information about the boy's youth, it would be wrong to assume that the son of the most powerful among Tenji's ministers would not have been recognized at court. The first mention of him dates from the third year of Emperor Jitô's reign (689), when he and seven other people were made judges.<sup>499</sup> Fuhito is further mentioned in an edict from Keiun 4 (707), the last year of Emperor Monmu's reign. According to it, he had served "*with bright and pure heart*" not only to the current but also to the previous emperors, and he should therefore be rewarded accordingly. Furthermore, his father Kamatari is compared to Takeuchi no Sukune, a legendary figure in Japanese history who is believed to have been the ancestor of many noble families.<sup>500</sup> Interestingly enough, Takeuchi no Sukune is enshrined in some Hachiman shrines, thus bringing up associations of the cult of the deity which reached the apex of its influence during Shômu's reign. Therefore, it could be assumed that Kamatari was supposed to be revered as the said legendary figure and even enshrined due to his loyal service to the emperor. This interpretation could possibly show the immense influence which the father exerted on the rulers whom he served. Naturally, the respect for the Fujiwara name was later transferred to the son. On the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Taihō 1 (701), Fuhito was appointed Dainagon (major counselor, or chief counselor of state).<sup>501</sup> In Wadō 1 (708), he became Udaijin (Minister of the Right)<sup>502</sup> and in Yôrô 2 (718), was offered, but refused, the post of Dajō-daijin (Chancellor of the Realm, or Chief Minister)<sup>503</sup>. Here, it should be noted that the position of Chief Minister was first given to Prince Ôtomo, Emperor Tenji's son, and could thus be considered relatively new for the Japanese political world. After Prince Ôtomo's death, it was reserved for princes (members of the Imperial family) and could not be occupied by commoners.

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<sup>497</sup> See Hiraizumi 1997: 70, 79

<sup>498</sup> See Ponsonby-Fane 1962: 34

<sup>499</sup> See *Nihonshoki*, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 390/391

<sup>500</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 慶雲 [Keiun] 4.4.15 【 S 0 2 】

<sup>501</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 大宝 [Taihō] 1.3.21

<sup>502</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 和銅 [Wadō] 1.3.13

<sup>503</sup> See Ponsonby-Fane 1962: 35

It could, therefore, be assumed that Fuhito had immense influence at court and enjoyed the favor of the emperor to such an extent that the sovereign was ready to give him a title which until then could be borne only by the Imperial bloodline. It should be noted that even though Fuhito refused the title while still alive, he was appointed Dajō-daijin posthumously.<sup>504</sup> Fuhito was one of the compilers of the Taihō Code from 701 which implemented the administrative system of Tang China and put an end to the process set into motion by Emperor Kōtoku in 645.

Similar to the situation after Kamatari's death, Fuhito's direct descendants also enjoyed many benefits and honors thanks to their predecessor's political merit. In 718, two of his sons, Fusasaki and Muchimaro, were appointed to the positions of Sangi (associate counselor) and of hi-Sangi (candidate for associate counsellor), respectively.<sup>505</sup> Even though his sons' political carriers were something to be proud of, probably the most important achievement of Fuhito was the marriage of his daughter Miyako to Emperor Monmu. She was selected as Chief Consort and even though she was not made an Empress (kōgō), she eventually became the mother of the next emperor, Shōmu.<sup>506</sup> Thus, a tradition was set for Fujiwara women to marry into the Imperial family, a deed which eventually made the difference between the Soga and the Fujiwara. While the Soga ministers also married off their daughters to members of the Imperial House, those political marriages were not their primary objective and also not the main source of their influence. In contrast to them, the Fujiwara utilized the marriages between their daughters and the emperors, or Crown Princes, and turned them into a strict policy which later became the main source of their political power.<sup>507</sup> Almost immediately after their victory over Soga in 645, the Fujiwara began to work on that strategy and thus established their own power base in the heart of the political scene. Beginning with Emperor Tenmu, all emperors from his branch of the Imperial line had either a Fujiwara wife or a Fujiwara mother, which immensely elevated the position of the family. Whereas in Tenmu's case, his two Fujiwara wives had a low court rank and their children were not considered potential candidates for the throne, the Fujiwara wife of Emperor Monmu happened to be the mother of Crown Prince Obito, later Emperor Shōmu. The pinnacle of that policy, however, was reached in 716 with the marriage between Fuhito's third daughter Kōmyōshi and the then-Crown Prince Obito, the future Emperor Shōmu, who was the son born to Fujiwara no Miyako and Emperor Monmu.<sup>508</sup> Thus, Emperor Shōmu was the first sovereign related to Fujiwara by blood, a fact which created a controversy in the Japanese society and politics. On the one hand, as a Crown Prince and heir apparent, he was educated to be an emperor, the ultimate ruler of the state who didn't need the permission or approval of his courtiers, as he stood above them on the political ladder. On the other hand, as a member of the Fujiwara clan, he had to respect the wishes of the clan head Fuhito, and later Muchimaro, and even to submit to them. Thus, the bloodline of the young emperor put him in a dual position from which, as it would be seen, he could hardly escape throughout his reign.

Two years later, in 718, the young couple became parents to a baby girl, Imperial Princess Abe, the later Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. Shōmu ascended the throne in 724, and five years later elevated his Fujiwara wife to the position of Empress (kōgō). Thus, Kōmyōshi became the first woman with a non-Imperial blood to be appointed Empress, something unheard of until then<sup>509</sup>, and set the beginning of a tradition that the chief consort of the emperor should belong to the Fujiwara family. From that point on, there were only few main spouses of the sovereign who weren't daughters of Fujiwara ministers.

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<sup>504</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 養老 [Yōrō] 4.10.23

<sup>505</sup> See Ponsonby-Fane 1962: 35

<sup>506</sup> See Ponsonby-Fane 1962: 35

<sup>507</sup> See Ponsonby-Fane 1962: 33

<sup>508</sup> See Takagi 2018: 184

<sup>509</sup> See Takagi 2018: 184

At the time of Kōmyōshi's appointment as Empress, her father Fuhito was long since dead (he died in 720), but his four sons, the infamous Fujiwara brothers Muchimaro, Fusasaki, Umakai and Maro, filled the vacuum left by him. Muchimaro was appointed to the position of Dainagon in 729<sup>510</sup> and in 737, one day before his death, he was given the position of Minister of the Left (Sadaijin)<sup>511</sup>. His brothers' political carriers were not as remarkable as his own had been, but the four of them were nevertheless a political force to be reckoned with. Another guarantee of the clan's future seemed to have been the birth of a baby boy between Shōmu and his empress in 727 who was almost immediately made Crown Prince, thus ensuring that the future emperor would, similar to his father, belong to the Fujiwara family. However, Prince Motoi didn't live long and died the next year. For Shōmu's, and most certainly for Fujiwara's, disappointment, no other children were born to the Imperial couple, which left the future of the throne at risk.<sup>512</sup> On the other hand, the emperor's second wife Agatainukai no Hirotoji had already given birth to three children: the Imperial Princesses Fuwa and Inoe, and the Imperial Prince Asaka, who, after Prince Motoi's death, seemed the most likely successor to the throne.

The inability of Emperor Shōmu and his Fujiwara Empress to produce a male heir to the throne created a succession crisis within the Imperial House. With only the son of a second wife as a potential candidate for the throne, Shōmu's options were limited. He had to either make Prince Asaka the next Crown Prince or to turn his eyes toward the descendants of former rulers. The best candidate seemed to have been Prince Nagaya, son of Prince Takechi, the eldest son of Emperor Tenmu and Dajō-daijin during Emperor Jitō's reign. Nagaya was married to Princess Kibi, daughter of Emperor Genmei and Prince Kusakabe. The couple had three sons who would have been considered potential candidates for the throne if Emperor Shōmu didn't have a male heir. That prospect, however, was crushed in 729, when the so-called Nagaya Incident occurred. The prince was falsely accused of treason and had to commit suicide in his residence before the eyes of his wife. The princess and their three sons joined their husband and father in death. After the Incident was resolved, there remained suspicions that the accusations against the Prince were concocted by the four Fujiwara brothers, in an attempt to "preserve" the throne for the Fujiwara bloodline.<sup>513</sup> While their strategy brought only negatives for the continuation of the Imperial bloodline, it nevertheless strengthened the Fujiwara position at court. With the Prince taken care of, the Fujiwara brothers took firm hold of the government and became the practical rulers of the land. That hold was only relieved when the brothers fell victim to a smallpox epidemic in 737.<sup>514</sup> The relatively long period during which Muchimaro and his three brothers practically reigned over the realm, however, created a dangerous precedent which their descendants devoutly followed later: Shōmu's controversial situation as an emperor and member of the Fujiwara clan inevitably undermined the authority of the Imperial House and the sovereign in particular. For any other family powerful enough to take the power, the situation in which the emperor was unable to exert his authority to its full extent due to his bloodline could have been considered an indication that a suitable marriage policy could make them the rulers-in-shadow of the land.

For the time being, however, it was the Fujiwara who continued to hold power at court even after the death of Muchimaro and his brothers. In fact, it was the second son of Fujiwara no Muchimaro, Nakamaro, under whose guidance did the Fujiwara family reach its peak during the Nara period. Nakamaro was born in 706. According to Shoku Nihongi, due to his cleverness he was elevated to the position of secretary to serve Dainagon Abe no Sukunamaro. Under him, he studied arithmetic and

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<sup>510</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 1.2.11

<sup>511</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 9.7.25

<sup>512</sup> See Takagi 2018: 184

<sup>513</sup> See Takagi 2018: 185; Ueda 1996: 200

<sup>514</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 9.7

showed excellent abilities. He was thus elevated to the rank of toneri and became Daigaku no shōjō (大学少允 Junior Secretary) in 734.<sup>515</sup> In 741, four years after his father's death, Nakamaro joined the Minbu-shō (民部省, Ministry of Popular Affairs)<sup>516</sup> and two years later, in 743, he was promoted to sangi (associate counselor).<sup>517</sup> At around that time, Nakamaro was involved in a controversy regarding Prince Asaka's death. The Prince and only male descendant of Emperor Shōmu died in 744 at the young age of 17 of, as Shoku Nihongi reported, leg pain.<sup>518</sup> Among the many theories which revolved around the incident and which will be discussed in the next chapters, there was also one regarding the supposed involvement of Fujiwara no Nakamaro. At the time of Asaka's death, he was situated at Kuni no miya in his capacity as a deputy of the emperor during the latter's absence from the capital. However, on the day of Prince Asaka's death, Nakamaro could not be found at his place of duty, which raised suspicions of his potential involvement in the Prince's death. The flaw in that theory, however, is the lack of any written sources narrating Nakamaro's punishment due to his potential involvement in the incident or his arbitrary leaving of Kuni no miya. On the contrary, he was even elevated in rank, first in 745, when he was given third rank during his New Year's visit to the court situated at Shiragaki at the time, and then in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the same year when he was made governor of Ōmi. Therefore, it is likely that at the time of the Prince's death, Nakamaro was still at Shiragaki where he was given the third court rank during his New Year's visit to the emperor.<sup>519</sup> Then, in 746, Nakamaro was transferred to the Ministry of Ceremonial (式部省, Shikibu-shō)<sup>520</sup>. It was believed that he had a good relationship with his aunt Empress Kōmyōshi. After Emperor Kōken's ascension to the throne in 749, Nakamaro's political power began to expand. In 756, after Retired Emperor Shōmu's death, the Household Agency of Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi was reformed into a structure called Shibichūdai (紫微中台) and Nakamaro was appointed to the position of its director (shibirei).<sup>521</sup> The new bureau was named after its Tang equivalent and held vast power similar to that of the emperor. The first two characters referred to the Polar Star and were often translated as "purple subtlety" or "purple tenuity".<sup>522</sup> As the Agency itself was a structure outside the jurisdiction of the Ritsuryō system, one could easily assume that Nakamaro didn't hold any important political position. In fact, however, the Agency, and by extension its director, held the authority to implement the orders (ryōji, 令旨) of Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi, as well as to exercise military power. Its status was equivalent to Dajōkan (council of state) and its head was treated equally to Dainagon (chief counselor of the state). In 757, when the position of Shibirei was renamed to Shibinaishō and began to be considered equal to a minister, its holder obtained the authority to implement the emperor's orders without consulting the Dajōkan (Council of State) and the Chūmushō (Ministry of Central Affairs). It is believed that the Shibinaishō played a role equivalent to that of Uchitsuōmi (an important governmental post presiding over important state affairs while assisting the emperor). Although the Shibichūdai was apparently "only" the household agency of Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi, it could be considered a military and administrative organization established to counterbalance the anti-Nakamaro and anti-Kōken

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<sup>515</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 8.9.18

<sup>516</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 13.7.3

<sup>517</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 15.5.5

<sup>518</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 16.1.11 and 13

<sup>519</sup> See Takinami 1998: 63

<sup>520</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 18.3.5

<sup>521</sup> See Takinami 1998: 99

<sup>522</sup> See Bender 2021: 36

movement within the court and the Dajōkan<sup>523</sup>, borne out of the nobles' dissatisfaction with Shōmu's decision to appoint his daughter to the position of Crown Prince. Thus, in playing this role, the structure, and its director in particular, could be assumed to have been a key tool for ensuring the stability at court during the early reign of Emperor Kōken.

Speaking of dissatisfied courtiers with Emperor Shōmu's choice to appoint his daughter as Crown Prince, one of them named Tachibana no Naramaro even went as far as to plan to elevate another candidate to the Imperial position. A resurrection was planned in which the sitting sovereign was to be dethroned and a new emperor chosen by the conspirators was to be elevated to the position. Eventually, Fujiwara no Nakamaro played a major role in the suppression of the Naramaro's conspiracy. After that nothing stood before Fujiwara no Nakamaro's political ambitions. His son-in-law and adopted son Prince Ōi had already been appointed to the position of Crown Prince (that happened in the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 1 (757)<sup>524</sup>. Even if his aunt and ardent supporter Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi, who at the age of 56 was already not in her best health, died, the Fujiwara had someone to rely on to support their political decisions. From that point of view, Nakamaro only needed to wait for his protégé to be enthroned. His expectations were fulfilled in Tenpyō hōji 2 (758) when the prince ascended the throne and became Emperor Junnin.<sup>525</sup> That was the moment of triumph for Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Under his influence, the emperor introduced Tang Chinese-based systems of government and, as a result, changed all governmental positions' descriptions into their Chinese equivalents<sup>526</sup>. In a short time, Nakamaro was given many honors: firstly, he was appointed as "taiho" (a title which meant "Grand Guardian", but which after the change of the government's positions, was equivalent to Minister of the Right)<sup>527</sup> and the honor name Emi no Oshikatsu was accorded to him together with the permission to have a personal seal and to mint copper coins. Then, in 759, he was mentioned in an Imperial edict with the words "esteemed father-in-law", which put him in a position almost equal to that of Emperor Shōmu or Retired Emperor Kōken.<sup>528</sup> The father and grandfather of Nakamaro were also honored posthumously. In the meantime, his sons were appointed to important state positions as it could be seen from the Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 764. His second son Masaki was elevated to Senior Upper Fourth rank. His third son Kusumaro was given the Junior Lower Fourth rank. His fourth son Asakari was appointed to the position of sangi. His fifth son Ayumaro was elevated to Junior Upper Fifth rank. His seventh son Hiroo was awarded the Junior Lower Fifth rank. His sons Shikachi and Torisao (Saotori) were both appointed sängen and were given positions in the Imperial Guard.<sup>529</sup> All those designations not only strengthened the position of the Fujiwara but also proved that for a relatively short period of time between the reign of Emperor Tenji and that of Emperor Junnin the family had become so strong that its members were able to effectively influence the enthronement of the emperor as well as to control and manipulate the sitting sovereign.

### Succession issues within the Imperial House

The succession problems which many emperors had to overcome during their reigns could be considered another important characteristic of the middle and late Nara period. The initial signs of those issues could be traced back to the death of Emperor Tenji in 672. Shortly thereafter, his son and

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<sup>523</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (e): Shibichudai (紫微中台)

<sup>524</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 1.4.4

<sup>525</sup> See Emperor Kōken's abdication edict in 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 2.8 【 S 2 3 】

<sup>526</sup> See pp. 337

<sup>527</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 4.1.4 【 S 2 6 】

<sup>528</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 3.6.16 【 S 2 5 】

<sup>529</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 8.9.18

supposed successor Prince Ôtomo was defeated by his uncle Prince Ôama in the Jinshin War and the latter ascended the throne as Emperor Tenmu. Tenmu's enthronement set the beginning of a new branch within the Imperial House which is referred to by many historians as the Kusakabe line (in the name of Tenmu's son and Crown Prince who died before his ascension). As the said bloodline was not as strongly represented within the Imperial House as that of Emperor Tenji, the birth of a male successor whose duty was to continue it became one of the main goals of the future emperors. Ironically, however, Tenmu and his descendants were very unlucky in their efforts to ensure their hold on the throne. Prince Kusakabe, the son of the emperors Tenmu and Jitô, for example, died in 689 while still a Crown Prince.<sup>530</sup> The effort to "preserve" the throne for Kusakabe's son, Prince Karu, who later became Emperor Monmu could be considered the main reason for Empress Uno's decision to be enthroned as Emperor Jitô. It was supposedly around that time when the legend of Kusakabe's black sword handed down to the future emperors as a proof of their link to the prince's bloodline originated.<sup>531</sup> Nevertheless, Emperor Monmu who succeeded his grandmother Jitô on the throne also did not live long enough to pass down the throne to his already grown son Prince Obito. Monmu's death in 707<sup>532</sup>, while Obito was still a 9-year-old boy, made it necessary for his mother, Imperial Princess Abe, to ascend to the throne as Emperor Genmei.<sup>533</sup> After eight years on the throne, Genmei stepped down in favor of her daughter Emperor Genshō<sup>534</sup> who ruled from 715 until 724, thus creating a precedent in Japanese history of a female emperor being followed on the throne by another female ruler. Genshō's reign could be regarded as a regency until Prince Obito reached an age suitable to succeed to the throne. That became fact in 724 when the Prince was enthroned as Emperor Shōmu. Similar to his predecessors from the Kusakabe line, however, Shōmu was also unlucky in matters regarding the succession. His empress Kōmyōshi gave birth to only a girl, Imperial Princess Abe, in 718, and a boy, Prince Motoi, who was appointed to the position of Crown Prince shortly after his birth in 727 but died in the next year.<sup>535</sup> Shōmu's second wife Agatainukai no Hirotoji, on the other hand, gave birth to the Imperial Princesses Inoe and Fuwa as well as to Prince Asaka, who, for a short time, was considered a potential candidate for the throne. That option, however, seemed to have not been the best one from a political point of view and the reason for that was trivial: the kin of Prince Asaka's mother simply didn't have enough influence and wealth to support the throne in the way the Fujiwara had done it since their rise to power.<sup>536</sup> Shōmu's dissatisfaction with such a choice was so strong that he eventually decided to appoint the daughter born to him by his empress as the next Crown Prince, a move unheard of in the history of the Imperial family. Thus, Imperial Princess Abe became Crown

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<sup>530</sup> See Nihonshoki, Vol.2, transl. by Aston 1896: 391

<sup>531</sup> See Sakurada 2016: 54/55; Ooms 2016: 125/126

<sup>532</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 慶雲 [Keiun] 4.6.15

<sup>533</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 慶雲 [Keiun] 4.7.17 【S 0 3】; Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 5

<sup>534</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 靈龜 [Reiki] 1.9.2

<sup>535</sup> See Takagi 2018: 182

<sup>536</sup> That much could be assumed after seeing the court ranks bestowed on Kōmyōshi and Agatainukai no Hirotoji in 737, respectively: “しかもその際与えられた位が、藤原氏の娘たち（無位）が正三位であるのに対して、[...] これは同じ日（二月十四日）に昇叙された安積親王の母皇犬養広刀自（正五位下）でさえも従三位と、位階の上では新参の藤原氏のキサキにも及ばなかったこととともに家格意識が厳然と存していたことを知る。[In addition, in regard to the ranks bestowed on that occasion, the daughters of the Fujiwara clan (who had no rank) were given the Senior third rank, [...] Even the mother of Prince Asaka, Agatainukai no Hirotoji (Senior Fifth Lower rank), whom was bestowed a new rank on the same day (14<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month), was given Junior third rank, which means that in terms of rank she stood no higher than the newcomer empress from the Fujiwara clan. It could, therefore, be assumed that the principles of family hierarchy were strictly followed.], Takinami 1998: 45



Prince Abe in 738<sup>537</sup>, the first and until now the only female Crown Prince in Japanese history. While an appointment of a woman to a position traditionally held by men was something sudden, there were a few things which spoke favorably of Shōmu's daughter. Firstly, the Fujiwara family were surely delighted to learn that an Imperial Princess who belonged to their kin on both her father's and her mother's side would someday become emperor. Moreover, as Takinami Sadako explains, while both the Imperial Princess and the Prince were direct descendants, that is, children of the emperor from his lawful wives, Princess Abe was older (at the time 21)<sup>538</sup>. Even though that fact surely didn't have any deciding weight under the circumstances in the Imperial family, it would have been much better to appoint a Crown Prince who was nearer to the age of forty as was the custom for the enthronement of a new ruler. In contrast to the cases of the emperors Genmei and Genshō who ascended the throne without having been Crown Princes before, the succession issue during Emperor Shōmu's reign had completely other dimensions. Even though there was no law allowing only Crown Princes to ascend the throne (as per the example of the most female rulers, and even some male sovereigns), it was a historical fact that women were enthroned only after the abdication or the death of the male sovereigns before them. That unwritten rule put Shōmu in a dilemma. On the one hand, he was unwilling to abdicate only for his daughter to be able to ascend the throne. On the other hand, however, he knew that the country needed the security of knowing that the future of the throne was ensured. Faced with such difficulties, the emperor's only choice was to appoint Imperial Princess Abe to the position of Crown Prince.

In order to make the people, commoners and nobles alike, accept Crown Princess Abe, Shōmu ordered her to perform a Go-Sechi Dance in his and Retired Emperor Genshō's presence. The Go-Sechi Dance was believed to have originated during Emperor Tenmu's reign as the sovereign played the koto and young maidens waved their sleeves in five different dances. Later, the dance began to be associated with prayers for good harvest and became part of the Toyoakari no sechie, an Imperial court ceremony held on Daijōsai (first ceremonial rice offering by newly enthroned emperor).<sup>539</sup> It was never conducted by Princes of the Imperial family, much less by Crown Princes. Therefore, the only explanation for Crown Prince Abe's performance could have been her father's wish to justify his choice before the people. The same interpretation could be found in the Shoku Nihongi edict narrating the ceremony. In it, there is a passage to be found which refers to Emperor Tenmu's reasoning behind the creation of that particular dance. It reads:

“The Sage Emperor Tenmu [...] thought to govern all under heaven in peace. He divinely considered that to harmoniously maintain order between high and low and to govern in tranquility, both rites and music should always stand together. Thus We have heard that He first composed this Go-Sechi Dance, to maintain tranquility forever.”<sup>540</sup>

The part “*both rites and music should always stand together*” could be further interpreted as “both tradition and innovation should always stand together”. As it was the female Crown Prince who eventually performed the dance, Shōmu, supported by Genshō, surely wanted to show that as much as he honored the tradition of appointing a male heir to the throne, it was after all his choice to break with custom and to introduce an innovation: the appointment of a female as a Crown Prince with the same rights and responsibilities as a male.<sup>541</sup> Only through the merging of tradition and innovation

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<sup>537</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 10.1.13

<sup>538</sup> Takinami 1998: 49

<sup>539</sup> See Kumar 2008: 145

<sup>540</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 18

<sup>541</sup> On that matter Herman Ooms expresses an interesting hypothesis: “Even the physical traces (broom and plow) of the adoption of Tang ritual, if that is what we should call the event... On the other hand if indeed Kōken

could the state be ruled in tranquility. The presence of Retired Emperor Genshō, Shōmu's aunt who eventually ascended the throne with the clear idea of keeping it until his coming-of-age ceremony, only meant that she also saw Crown Prince Abe in a position much different from her own had been. In contrast to Genshō, Abe had the right to reign as an emperor rather than as throneholder for the next male heir to the throne. Shōmu's explicit wish that the Crown Prince should perform the dance showed that he saw the performance not simply as an entertainment but also as an opportunity for his daughter to meet and to be recognized by all courtiers.<sup>542</sup> Moreover, as the dance was first introduced during the reign of Emperor Tenmu, it could be assumed that the Crown Prince who performed it would officially be acknowledged as a lawful heir to the throne from the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line. After that peculiar legitimizing ceremony was conducted, the Crown Prince began to receive the special education necessary to perform her future duties. Until 740, Abe was taught by her mother, the empress. Then, her tutor became Kibi no Makibi, a recognized scholar of institutional government who had studied in China for almost 20 years (716 – 736).<sup>543</sup> He was responsible for the Crown Prince's education in the Chinese classics and the art of governance.

Although both the emperor and the Retired Emperor didn't spare any efforts in trying to present Crown Prince Abe as an acceptable candidate for the throne, her being a female was not anything which could easily be overcome with a single legitimization ceremony. The voices supporting the case of Prince Asaka only became stronger.<sup>544</sup> They believed that only the tender age of the Prince (at the time he was only 10 years old) prevented Shōmu from directly appointing him as his successor, and that the choice of Imperial Princess Abe for the position of Crown Prince was something akin to the cases of all previous female emperors who more or less acted as throneholders for their male successors. Until the Prince reached a suitable age for enthronement, it would be his older half sister who would "preserve" the throne for him. In the meantime, Asaka would have the time and resources to forge political alliances and to prepare himself for the responsibility. Thus, a party began to form around the prince with Tachibana no Moroe being one of his most influential supporters. According to a poem in *Manyōshū*<sup>545</sup>, after Crown Prince Abe's appointment as a successor, Moroe's son Naramaro held a feast at the minister's former residence at which many political figures were present. Two of the guests were members of the Agatainukai clan: Yoshio and Mochio, and were related not only to Prince Asaka's mother Hirotoji but also to Moroe's mother Agatainukai no Michiyo. At the feast were also the Ôtomo brothers Yakamochi and Fumimochi whose family was close to that of Moroe.<sup>546</sup> Their clan was one of those which didn't accept Crown Prince Abe's appointment and which were strongly against the Fujiwara clan's attempts to rule the land through their connections to the throne. Even though that gathering was not regarded as a political one in 738, the later political developments, especially Naramaro's conspiracy from 757, showed that the seeds were (indirectly) sowed around that time, as some of the people present at the feast later supported Naramaro's cause. It is unclear whether the young prince had a stable communication with the people who visited Naramaro's feast in Moroe's honor in 738. His stance on the issue of his half sister's appointment to the position of Crown Prince was also never confirmed. However, according to *Manyōshū*, Ôtomo no Yakamochi had a close connection with him. Some of the poems also narrate that the Prince himself arranged several

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handled both plow and broom, she was positioning herself as both emperor and empress at the same time – in other words, fully capable of securing all aspects of providing what a *tenka* needed: agricultural and textile products.", Ooms 2016: 122

<sup>542</sup> See Ooms 2016: 121

<sup>543</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 13.7.3

<sup>544</sup> See Takinami 1998: 56, 60

<sup>545</sup> See 万葉集 [Manyōshū] Vol.8: 08/1508; 08/1509

<sup>546</sup> See Takinami 1998: 56

gatherings such as the one during his father's stay at Kuni no miya (Tenpyô 15 (743), fall – winter)<sup>547</sup> or the banquet at Ikujioka on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Tenpyô 16 (744). At the latter, the guests prayed for the prince's long life.<sup>548</sup> Those banquets and gatherings could be regarded as Asaka's attempts to ensure political support for his ambitions. Unfortunately, the young prince died less than a month after the banquet at Ikujioka without any possibility to realize his potential political talents. The cause of death was unclear, and, considering the fact that it brought many positives not only for the Crown Prince but also for her Fujiwara kin, it could be even described as mysterious.

The possibility that Asaka's political opponents had anything to do with his death becomes even stronger if one considers the fact that he passed away not only a year after his half sister's legitimization ceremony but also at a time when the emperor often changed his residences.<sup>549</sup> The young prince's passing (at the time of his death he was only 17 years old) coincided with Emperor Shômu's discussion with the court officials whether the capital should be changed to Kuni no miya or Naniwa no miya. Despite the almost unanimous decision in favor of Kuni no miya, the emperor once more decided to go to Naniwa and called the court to serve him there.<sup>550</sup> It seemed that the prince wanted to follow his father but instead of news of his arrival, those of his sudden death reached the emperor on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Tenpyô 16 (744).

“《天平十六年（七四四）閏正月乙亥【十一】》○乙亥。[…]是日。安積親王、縁脚病從桜井頓宮還。

《天平十六年（七四四）閏正月丁丑【十三】》○丁丑。薨。時年十七。[…]親王、天皇之皇子也。母、夫人正三位巢犬養宿禰広刀自。”

*[Tenpyô 16 (744) New Year, 24<sup>th</sup> day of the sexagenary cycle (11<sup>th</sup> day). [...] On that day, Prince Asaka suddenly returned from his residence in Sakurai due to leg pain.*

*Tenpyô 16 (744) New Year, 14<sup>th</sup> day of the sexagenary cycle (13<sup>th</sup> day). [The Prince] had died. At the time he was 17 years old. [...] He was an Imperial prince, son of the Emperor. His mother was Agatainukai Sukune no Hirotoji, Imperial wife of third rank.]<sup>551</sup>*

As one can see from the description of Prince Asaka's last moments, it becomes obvious that he died within the short span of two days from something as trivial as “leg pain”. Moreover, he wouldn't, or couldn't, take the chance to follow his father but rather decided to return to Kuni no miya.<sup>552</sup> Could it be then that the “leg pain” was something much more complex and serious than it seemed? There are several theories about the death cause of Prince Asaka. According to Takinami Sadako, the encyclopedia “Wamyôshô” from the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century describes the disease beriberi with

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<sup>547</sup> See 万葉集 [Manyôshû] Vol.6: 06/1040

<sup>548</sup> See Takinami 1998: 57/58

<sup>549</sup> Theoretically, the seat of the emperor's power should have been Nara since the reign of Emperor Genmei (r. 707 – 715) until the reign of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781 – 806), who changed the capital to Nagaoka in 784. In fact, however, during Shômu's reign the capital was changed over many times. In the span of five years (from 740 to 745) he changed residences seven times, with all changes having been associated with heavy budget and labor force load. Shômu returned to Heijô-kyô to stay shortly before his death in 755, with his last residence having been Yakushiji Temple., See Takagi 2018: 190/193

<sup>550</sup> See Takagi 2018: 191

<sup>551</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyô] 16.1.11 and 13

<sup>552</sup> According to Takinami Sadako, it would have been much easier for the Prince to go to Naniwa instead to return to Kuni no miya., See Takinami 1998: 62

all its symptoms which seem close enough to those shown by the Prince shortly before his death.<sup>553</sup> The said disease causes numbness and swelling of the limbs due to vitamin B deficiency. The medical text “Ishinpô” from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century adds palpitations, shortness of breath or nausea to the symptoms. Takinami argues that the Prince could have died of beriberi because the modern medicine does not exclude the possibility of a sudden death due to shortness of breath or loss of consciousness caused by an enlarged heart, an effect of the disease.<sup>554</sup> Another theory is that which was already discussed in the previous chapter with the supposed involvement of Fujiwara no Nakamaro in Prince Asaka’s assassination. It is based on a poem composed by Ôtomo no Yakamochi at the banquet in Ikujioka according to which the prince was healthy one month before his death.<sup>555</sup> A third hypothesis also assumed assassination. It is based on the fact that the Imperial seal previously situated in Kuni no miya was relocated to Naniwa on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month, that is shortly after Asaka’s death. Takinami Sadako sees that as a possible proof of the Prince’s assassination.<sup>556</sup>

Nevertheless, while the death cause of the young Prince Asaka who was the only remaining male descendant of Emperor Shômu remained unexplained, one could assume that after the Prince’s passing, the opposition against Crown Prince Abe’s appointment would subside. Surprisingly, however, it became even stronger. The first signs could be seen in the year after Prince Asaka’s death, Tenpyô 17 (745). As it was already mentioned, Emperor Shômu was a ruler who didn’t like to settle in one place for a long period of time. In the 5<sup>th</sup> month of 745, the emperor returned to Heijô-kyô for the first time after five years. That decision was probably spurred by the series of misfortunes which befell the state in 745.<sup>557</sup> In the 8<sup>th</sup> month, Shômu left for Nanba<sup>558</sup> but shortly after his arrival there, he fell ill, a condition which persisted and caused concern among the courtiers. These were the first signs of the deteriorating health of the emperor, which continued in different form and with different severity until his death in 756. The condition of the sovereign, however, caused distress to the courtiers to such a point that they began to make plans for the future as one could see in a Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the year 757 after Tachibana no Naramaro’s conspiracy had been revealed.

“去天平十七年。先帝陛下幸難波。寢膳乖宜。于時、奈良麻呂謂全成曰。陛下枕席不安。殆至大漸。然猶無立皇嗣。恐有變乎。願率多治比国人。多治比犢養。小野東人。立黃文而為君。以答百姓之望。大伴・佐伯之族、隨於此挙、前將無敵。”

*[When the previous Emperor went to Nanba in Tenpyô 17, [his condition became worse as] he didn’t have much appetite and couldn’t sleep well. At the time, Naramaro told himself that even though the Emperor’s condition now gradually improved, the Crown Prince was not yet [firmly] established. “In case the Emperor died, disturbances would occur. Therefore, I [Naramaro] implore Tajihi no Kunihito, Tajihi no Kôshikai and Ono no Azumahito [to help me to] put Prince Kibumi on the throne and thus to answer the wishes of the common people. If the clans Ôtomo and Saeki stand on our side, then the victory would definitely be ours.”]*<sup>559</sup>

From that testimony, it becomes clear that even though the Crown Prince was appointed some seven years ago, she still wasn’t recognized as such by the courtiers and some powerful families. Similar to

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<sup>553</sup> See Takinami 1998: 62

<sup>554</sup> See Takinami 1998: 63

<sup>555</sup> See Takinami 1998: 63

<sup>556</sup> See Takinami 1998: 63

<sup>557</sup> See Takagi 2018: 192

<sup>558</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyô] 17.8.28

<sup>559</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.4

the case of Emperor Genshō whose enthronement found opposition due to her having been an unmarried female, Naramaro and some other noble families wouldn't accept a ruler who could not ensure the future of the Imperial family through a direct descendant. From that point of view alone, Crown Prince Abe could not be heir apparent. Faced with the possibility of Shōmu's demise, the dissatisfied opposition began to search for potential male candidates for the throne among the other Imperial descendants. One of them was Prince Kibumi, son of the same Prince Nagaya who had been killed at the beginning of Shōmu's reign on suspicion of conspiracy against the sovereign. While in matters of lineage the prince and the Crown Prince were both related to the Fujiwara (Kibumi's mother was daughter of Fujiwara no Fuhito), it was probably the prince's gender which tipped the scales in his favor. From Naramaro's thoughts cited in *Shoku Nihongi*, it becomes clear that official ceremonies such as the one at which the Go-Sechi Dance was performed did not change the courtiers' opinion toward Crown Prince Abe. As the possibility of personal conflict between Naramaro and Abe or any faults in her educational background could be excluded as likely reasons for his animosity toward her, it could be only assumed that the Crown Prince was hated due to her being a woman, a fact which she couldn't change even if she wanted to do so. Even though Shōmu's recovery from his illness (the sovereign returned to Heijō-kyō on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 745<sup>560</sup>) thwarted Naramaro's plans for the time being, he surely didn't forget them. As one would see from the further developments, he simply decided to wait for another moment of social and political instability in order to try to overthrow the Crown Prince (at the moment of his conspiracy, already emperor) from her seat.

Now, one would ask what was Shōmu's opinion on the developments after Prince Asaka's death. Takinami Sadako describes the emperor's situation as "a labyrinth without an exit".<sup>561</sup> In fact, that comparison is not groundless. The sovereign's condition worsened for the first time in 745 and he was forced to at least try to solve the succession issue and all other problems caused by it. According to a *Shoku Nihongi* chronicle from the time:

“天皇不予。勅平城・恭仁留守、固守宮中。悉追孫王等、詣難波宮。遣使取平城宮鈴印。”

*[In the absence of the Emperor from Heijō-kyō or Kuni [no miya], an edict was issued for the Imperial palaces to be guarded. He ordered all Imperial grandchildren to visit him at Nanba and sent a messenger to bring the Imperial seal from Heijō-kyō.]*<sup>562</sup>

That action of the ailing emperor could be understood in two possible ways. He wanted either to ensure that his descendants would stay loyal to the new emperor, that is his daughter, in case he died, or to try to find a potential male heir to the throne. Considering the patriarchal views which prevailed in the Japanese state during Shōmu's time, the second possibility looks much more plausible. His will according to which Prince Funado had been appointed as Crown Prince for Emperor Kōken against her wishes<sup>563</sup> also proves that Shōmu saw his daughter only as a temporary solution to the succession issue. It could therefore be concluded that the emperor most likely wanted to extend his search for a successor up to the Imperial descendants. Even though they did not belong to the Fujiwara bloodline, they possessed a quality which his daughter did not and, unfortunately for her, she could not do anything about it: they were male. Due to the belief that the Imperial line could be continued only through the paternal side, which was further strengthened by the necessity for the preservation of the

<sup>560</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 17.9.26

<sup>561</sup> Takinami 1998: 71

<sup>562</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 17.9.19

<sup>563</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō shōhō] 8.5.2

Kusakabe line, it was only natural that the ailing emperor would seek a potential successor among the male Imperial descendants. Shōmu probably felt that he didn't have much time left and such concerns as ensuring the succession through an heir with Fujiwara blood in his veins were not relevant anymore. In appointing a successor among the Imperial descendants, the emperor wanted to at least ensure the continuation of the Imperial line. As it could be seen from the lineage of the people who were summoned, even the preservation of the Kusakabe (Tenmu) line was not as important for Shōmu as it had been before. From the Tenmu line, Prince Shioyaki, Prince Funado (both sons of Prince Niitabe), Prince Kurisu, Prince Chinu, Prince Ōchi (sons of Prince Naga), Prince Ōi, Prince Mihara, Prince Mishima, Prince Fune and Prince Ikeda (all sons of Prince Toneri) were present. The summoned Emperor Tenji's descendants were Prince Shirakabe and Prince Yuhara (sons of Imperial Prince Shiki).<sup>564</sup> Except Prince Shioyaki, the possibility is high that all of them came to the Imperial summon in 745. Prince Shioyaki was son-in-law of Emperor Shōmu thanks to his marriage to Imperial Princess Fuwa, Shōmu's daughter with Agatainukai no Hirotoji and Crown Prince Abe's half sister. Due to his inadequate affair with a court lady, the prince was banished to Izu in 742. He was pardoned in 745<sup>565</sup>, but his presence at such a gathering would have been most likely unwanted. Moreover, due to his bad reputation, it was improbable that he would be chosen among all the other princes as a potential successor to the throne. In any case, all these men were regarded as having been second- or third-generation Imperial descendants and under normal circumstances, would not have been considered candidates for the throne. However, in a time of crisis such as the one which befell the Imperial line during Shōmu's reign, even one among those Imperial princes could be accepted as a rightful successor. Of course, it would have been much better if any of Tenji's or Tenmu's sons had lived, but, as that had not been the case, one had to accept the fact that second- or third-generation Imperial descendants who were the closest relatives to their respective bloodlines could be enthroned.

In any case, the first possibility of Shōmu having wanted to ensure the Imperial descendants' loyalty toward his daughter should also not be excluded from consideration. After the death of Prince Asaka, the position of the Crown Prince was also undermined. After her appointment, Abe was accepted, albeit reluctantly and, as in Naramaro's case, even with envy and hatred, only because she was seen by many only as a temporary solution to the succession issue until Prince Asaka was old and experienced enough to succeed her on the throne.<sup>566</sup> After his death, however, it was hard to accept that a woman would sit on the Imperial throne not as a "throneholder" but rather as a sovereign in her own right. Shōmu probably feared that the courtiers would turn against Abe, thus making her accession impossible. Therefore, by summoning all Imperial descendants, he could have wanted to ensure their loyalty to the emperor, regardless of the gender of the person representing the position. If the bloodlines of Tenji and Tenmu swore their loyalty before Shōmu's chosen heir apparent, then Crown Prince Abe would have been recognized much easier by the courtiers and the common people. The possibility of Shōmu choosing a potential Crown Prince for his daughter from among the Imperial descendants could be seen only as another benefit which would have further ensured the stability of Crown Prince Abe's position. If she already had a designated male heir apparent, all people (and the chosen successor as well) would rest assured that the Imperial line would not be broken. Therefore, there would have been no need to rebel and conspire against the female sovereign.

The further developments on the matter and the continuing dissatisfaction with the Crown Prince after Shōmu's return to Heijō-kyō on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 745 proved that he was right in his

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<sup>564</sup> See Takinami 1998: 70

<sup>565</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (d): Prince Shioyaki (Shioyaki no Okimi) (塩焼王)

<sup>566</sup> See Takinami 1998: 56, 60

concerns and in his decision to summon the Imperial descendants. The Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of Tenpyô shôhō 1 (749) narrates that there were signs of societal disturbances which had slowly begun to spread throughout the capital and the country.

“以朝庭路頭屢投匿名書。下詔。教誡百官及大学生徒、以禁将来。”

*[Near the premises of the Imperial Gardens anonymous letters were often found [even though such an act was] against the Imperial orders. Because of that, many officials and scholars were reprimanded and dismissed.]*<sup>567</sup>

Even though it isn't explicitly explained that the letters thrown in the Imperial Gardens concerned the Crown Prince, that much could be assumed from the position of the people who were eventually punished for the deed. Moreover, the theme of the letters seemed to have been so uncomfortable for the emperor that he decided to issue an Imperial decree which prohibited leaving missives of any sort in the vicinity of the Imperial Palace. Thirdly, if the notes concerned state matters such as regional problems or corruption among officials, it would have been only natural for the people who composed them to come out with their names. Instead, they left the writings anonymous, a fact which indicated that the subject of the letters was very delicate and the authors feared of being exposed. From that point of view, it could be assumed that the missives were probably protest notes against the Crown Prince and her ascension to the throne. Even though in 749 Abe had been heir apparent for more than 11 years already (a period longer than any other Crown Prince before her), she still wasn't accepted and respected as such. Moreover, at the age of 32, she was not a child unaware of the political situation around her anymore. Still, she was denied the recognition which any other heir apparent in her situation would have enjoyed. From that narrative, it becomes obvious that even before the drastic measures taken by Tachibana no Naramaro in 757, many people involved in the state affairs shared the courtier's negative opinion regarding Abe's enthronement.

To make a long story short, one could only speculate about Shōmu's intentions and thoughts which moved him to summon the Imperial descendants in 745. It is a fact, however, that eleven years later he made a choice in favor of Prince Funado in his will. This choice was not discussed with Emperor Kōken but only conveyed to her later, thus bringing forth a series of events which ended with Funado's removal from the position. As if knowing that his decisions would only cause further confusion, Shōmu himself advised both his daughter and his courtiers:

“繼(天方)朕子太子(爾)明(仁)淨(久)二心無(之天)奉侍(礼)。朕(方)子二(利止)云言(波)無。唯此太子一人(乃味曾)朕(我)子(波)在。此心知(天)諸護助奉侍(礼)。然朕(波)御身都可良(之久)於保麻之麻須(爾)依(天)。太子(爾)天(都)日嗣高御座(乃)繼(天方)授(麻都流止[···]復勅(之久)。此帝(乃)位(止)云物(波)、天(乃)授不給(奴)人(爾)授(天方)保(己止毛)不得。亦變(天)身(毛)滅(奴流)物(曾)。朕(我)立(天)在人(止)云(止毛)、汝(我)心(爾)不能(止)知目(爾)見(天牟)人(乎波)改(天)立(牟)事(方)心(乃麻爾麻世与止)。命(伎)。”<sup>568</sup>

[Further you shall serve my child the Crown Princess Abe brightly and purely without duplicitous hearts. It is wrong to say that We have two children. We have only one child, the Crown Princess. Since all know Our feelings, let all protect and assist her. Now, since Our body

<sup>567</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyô shôhō] 1.2.21

<sup>568</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.10 【 S 4 5 】

is exhausted, We confer upon the Crown Princess the High Throne of the Heavenly Sun Succession as Empress Kōken.’

[...] Further Shōmu commanded Us: ‘As for the imperial throne, if it is conferred on someone whom Heaven has not ordained, that person will not be able to keep it. Rather it will cause that person to perish. Even though you may say ‘This is the person whom We have established’, yet if you come to know in your heart and see with your eye that that person is not competent, then follow your heart and replace that person. Thus he decreed.’]<sup>569</sup>

Even though the said edict is one from the reign of Emperor Shōtoku (2<sup>nd</sup> reign of Abe) and Shōmu’s words were only cited, it becomes clear that before his death he wished from his courtiers to accept and support the Crown Prince, that is his daughter. By saying that he didn’t have two children, Shōmu made it clear that he wanted the next emperor to be his direct descendant, a child born of his own flesh and blood, and not only an Imperial descendant who could have been from the same bloodline but was after all not directly connected with him. The second paragraph could be understood as a permission for the emperor to change the Crown Prince at any time if the latter didn’t prove his competence. It could, therefore, be speculated that in his last moments Shōmu regarded his daughter not as a temporary solution but as a rightful heir to the throne, since he gave her the freedom to decide for herself if the person chosen by him as her successor had the qualities to continue the Imperial line or not. If he saw her only as a throneholder for a potential male heir to the throne, he would not have relied on her to make decisions on a delicate matter such as the succession issue. He simply would have decreed for her to hold the throne until the Crown Prince was competent enough to succeed it. On the other hand, Shōmu’s last edict could also be understood as a general wish toward all statesmen in the country. Even though the words *“if you come to know in your heart and see with your eye that that person is not competent, then follow your heart and replace that person”* were intended for the future Emperor Kōken, they could also be regarded as an advice for the courtiers to help and support the sovereign but also to not hesitate to point out her mistakes. Then, in case that the ruler didn’t heed the words of her subjects, they would have been free to replace her in their hearts, which would have made her rule extremely difficult.

### Kōken/Shōtoku’s portrayal in Shoku Nihongi

Shoku Nihongi is the continuation of Nihon Shoki and the official record of the Imperial House from the reign of Emperor Monmu (697 – 707) until the tenth year of the reign of Emperor Kanmu (791, r. 781 – 806). It covers a period of 95 years and narrates the most important occurrences in the Japanese state during the Nara period. The work was completed in 797 and was redacted by Fujiwara no Tsugutada and Sugano no Mamichi. The former was the son of Fujiwara no Toyonari, son of Fujiwara no Muchimaro, one of the infamous four Fujiwara brothers who died of smallpox in 737. Toyonari, older brother of Fujiwara no Nakamaro, served as a minister during the reigns of the emperors Shōmu, Kōken, Junnin and Shōtoku. Due to him being Toyonari’s son, Tsugutada was also honored by the sovereign. He served as a minister at Emperor Kanmu’s court and even received the title of shōgun for an expedition to Northern Honshū to subside the emishi<sup>570</sup> (tribes consisting of horse-riding people specializing in archery and hit-and-run tactics much similar to the Middle Asian nomadic tribes). On the other hand, Sugano no Mamichi was a poet and scholar whose most notable position was his appointment as a tutor in Confucian classics of Crown Prince Ate, the future Emperor Heizei (r. 806 – 809). During the reigns of Kanmu and Heizei, he was appointed to various provincial posts and also in

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<sup>569</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 70

<sup>570</sup> See Nussbaum 2005: 211



the Dajōkan<sup>571</sup>, but his achievements could not be compared in any way to those of a member of the Fujiwara clan. According to *Shinsen shōjiroku* (新撰姓氏録, a genealogical record compiled on the orders of Emperor Saga (r. 809 – 823)), he was a descendant of the 14<sup>th</sup> king of Paekche, Geungusu.<sup>572</sup> As one can see, the main compilers and redactors of *Shoku Nihongi* had two completely different dispositions and fates. While Fujiwara no Tsugutada was a renowned member of the most powerful family at court at the time, as well as an adept general and politician, Sugano no Mamichi was simply a poet and more of a scholar than a soldier. Furthermore, the lineages of the two men were totally opposite. The Fujiwara family was descended from the Nakatomi clan and through them from Ameno-Koyane-no-Mikoto, one of the native Yamato deities. For a long time, their Nakatomi descendants were among the most avid supporters of Shintō, they also fought alongside the Mononobe clan against the Soga family in the conflict from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, Sugano no Mamichi could be considered of a lower social stance than the Fujiwara due to his predecessors having come from the continent.

The age of the two men and their relationships with the persons whose chronicles found place in *Shoku Nihongi* were also different. Fujiwara no Tsugutada was born in 727, the third year of Shōmu's reign, and died in 796, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Kanmu's reign. Although he served as a minister only to Emperor Kanmu, he lived during the reigns of Shōmu, Kōken, Junnin, Shōtoku, Kōnin and partly of Kanmu. Having been a member of the Fujiwara family, he also had the possibility to live in the heart of the political life and to be a witness to the most occurrences at court. Therefore, it could be assumed that his narrative could have been objective due to him having been an eyewitness to the reigns of the said rulers. At the same time, however, one should not forget that Tsugutada's descent could have influenced his narrative in Fujiwara's favor. In contrast, Sugano no Mamichi was born in 741 (the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Shōmu's reign) and died in 814 (the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Saga's reign). Although he lived during the reigns of more emperors than Tsugutada, it should be considered that Mamichi was still a child throughout the remaining years of Shōmu's reign. As a young man without a stable social position and a lineage not as renowned as the Fujiwara, he was able to enter the political world at a much later time. Therefore, it was impossible for him to be an eyewitness to the reigns of Kōken, Junnin and Shōtoku. Sugano no Mamichi received his first notable court position not until 778 (the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Kōnin's reign), and it could therefore be assumed that he had an objective look at the political situation at court only throughout the remaining reign of Kōnin as well as the reigns of Kanmu and Heizei. Although he lived during Saga's reign, at the time, he had already retired from his court position and lived as governor of the Hitachi Province. Thus, it could be assumed that his narrative of the reigns of the earlier Nara sovereigns could have been based only on information leaked outside the court rather than on personal knowledge.

Another point of concern in regard to the objectivity of *Shoku Nihongi* could be the personal views of the two men. As a member of the Fujiwara clan, Tsugutada clearly had a positive disposition toward all rulers connected with his own family. Therefore, one could expect from him a biased description of the lives of Shōmu and Kōken/Shōtoku. On the other hand, having been a scholar and even a personal tutor in Confucian matters of Crown Prince Ate, Sugano no Mamichi surely had more drastic and negative views toward untraditional things happening at court, for example, the appointment of a female Crown Prince and her enthronement later on. Simply put, it could be assumed that those two men could not have worked harmoniously enough to compile a huge work such as *Shoku Nihongi*. As a result, the finished narrative was, as Ross Bender points out:

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<sup>571</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (f): Sugano no Mamichi (菅野真道)

<sup>572</sup> See 新撰姓氏録 [Shinsen Shōjiroku], Vol. 3, 右京諸藩下 [Ukyō Shohan-ka]

“...rather a dry and tedious court chronicle in imitation of Chinese historical writing. The language of the chronicle is Middle Chinese, more or less the contemporary language at the court of Changan. It is distinguished by long lists of appointments to bureaucratic rank and promotions within the court hierarchy. However, this narrative of routine court affairs is ruptured by the insertion of [...] *senmyō*, imperial edicts inscribed in Old Japanese in what is known approximately as the *Man’yōgana* orthography. In addition, the document is sprinkled with other imperial edicts inscribed in Chinese, known as the *choku* and *shō*.”<sup>573</sup>

From that initial description of *Shoku Nihongi*, it could be assumed that the main editor was someone who knew the Chinese written tradition well enough to compile a Japanese historical text on its model. According to the biography of Sugano no Mamichi, he was well versed in Confucian classics, and subsequently also in Chinese. It could be quite possible that while Fujiwara no Tsugutada served as the main source of information about the reigns of the earlier Nara emperors, it was Sugano no Mamichi who eventually compiled the text known today as *Shoku Nihongi*.

In contrast to *Nihonshoki* that is written strictly as a chronicle, *Shoku Nihongi* is centered mainly on the Imperial edicts, most especially the *senmyō*. As Delmer Brown points out,

“During the first 73 years of Great Reform covered by the *Shoku Nihongi* (697 to 770), each of the state's major decisions was handed down as an Imperial Rescript that was usually recorded and subsequently included in the *Shoku Nihongi*. These Rescripts provide exceptionally meaningful evidence of what was being done and thought by Japan's authoritarian rulers at a time of extraordinary historical change. Each one begins with words that proclaim this to be a divine message being passed along by the current descendant of the Great Goddess.”<sup>574</sup>

Upon careful examination of *Shoku Nihongi*, it could be seen that the majority of all edicts narrated in the chronicle consists of the *choku* and *shō* (over 900), while the *senmyō* make up only a small part of them (62). In fact, there is hardly any difference between the contents of all three types of Imperial edicts. As Ross Bender explains,

“The term *senmyō* itself is a two-character compound meaning “to proclaim the command” — hence “imperial edict.” The Chinese characters “*choku*” and “*shō*” are each single graphs with the same meaning. In his study, Norinaga glossed all three of these terms as “*mikotonori*” — roughly, the “proclamation of the Emperor’s word.” The term “*mikotonori*” may be analyzed as the honorific particle “*mi*” (“exalted”), the noun “*koto*” (“word”), and the verb stem of “*noru*” (to declare”).

[...], both the *choku* and the *shō* during the years 749-70 dealt with a broad array of administrative matters. The *senmyō* are viewed by Japanese historians as a subset of the *shō*. Although it is tempting to believe that the *senmyō* were oral proclamations due to their peculiar Old Japanese language, while the Chinese forms were simply inscribed in the chronicle, we shall see that this distinction is not at all unambiguous. In fact, much of the difficulty in working with texts as formal as the court chronicle is to try to discern what was oral and what was written from the content and the contexts. The *senmyō* certainly sometimes read as marvelous ancient oratory, whereas the other edicts strike us as bland bureaucratic prose. But in their context of performance the distinction becomes more blurred.”<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> *Shoku Nihongi*, transl. by Bender (i) 2012: 4/5

<sup>574</sup> Brown (b) 2006

<sup>575</sup> Bender (c) 2009: 251

Therefore, one could probably ask why was it that the senmyô took precedence over the shô and choku to the point that they became the backbone of Shoku Nihongi's structure. Since there is hardly any difference in the thematic areas covered by the three types of Imperial edicts, it could be assumed that the language in which the senmyô had been transcribed made them stand out among the rest. As Ross Bender points out,

“The peculiarity of Old Japanese (jôko nihongo) is its orthography. Simply put, the senmyô are written in a combination of Chinese characters used semantically and phonetically, where the phonetic graphs are written in a smaller script and used primarily to denote verb endings and particles. (This style is sometimes referred to as “Man'yogana,” or the graphic style of the Man'yôshû, the eighth-century poetry anthology.) Some of the senmyô are prefaced in a grand archaic style, [...]”<sup>576</sup>

In that sense, they reflected the oral tradition at the time and could be described as the written evidence of the emperors' lives. Moreover, the Old Japanese was the embodiment of the Japanese way of utilizing the Chinese characters – the standard in written tradition not only on the continent but also in Nara Japan – and using them according to the peculiarities of the language of the island state. In one way or another, the Old Japanese not only was the predecessor to the Manyôgana but also formed the basis for the development of the independent Japanese writing systems hiragana and katakana later on. Thus, it could be said that the senmyô reflected the Japanese identity through the declarations of the ruler of the state. That is probably the reason why they enjoyed much more interest not only by the Japanese scholars but also by the Western world. In one of its articles, Jôganshiki (amendments and enforcement regulations of the Ritsuryô Code) reports of the reading of a senmyô, thus showing that there were special ceremonies which accompanied its presentation before the court. In comparison, no narrative of special rituals connected with the reading of choku and shô could be found, which further emphasizes the special station of the senmyô among the three types of Imperial edicts.

“The naiki presented the text to the Minister, the Minister submitted it to the Emperor. This being over, the Minister selected a capable man to read it, who received it and went back to his proper place. The Prince Imperial rose in the Eastern side of his seat and faced the West. Then everybody present from the princes downward rose and did likewise. The senmyô no taifu (herald) went to his appointed place and read the senmyô. Its contents were.... Then he said: Everybody obey this. The Prince Imperial first of all said “Aye.” Then everybody from the princes downward said likewise “Aye.” The Prince Imperial made obeisance. Then everybody present from the princes downward did the same. This was repeated as many times as senmyô were read. The ceremonial was always the same.”<sup>577</sup>

If the speculation that the senmyô were oral proclamations is true, then it would have been extremely difficult for someone to forge them or to falsify their contents. Therefore, the only field which could have been “tampered” with remained the “ordinary” chronicles narrating the events which took place during the reign of one or another ruler. Depending on the views and biases of the editors and compilers of Shoku Nihongi, it was absolutely possible for one detail to be added to or another removed from the narrative. That does not mean that certain facts were purposefully changed by the author with the intention to deceive the readers or to influence their opinions. While that surely could have been a possibility, such a thing is difficult to prove and thus remains only in the sphere of the speculation. It rather means that, considering the dynamic political situation in the middle and late Nara Japan, it was probably easier for the authors to “spare” certain informations in order to satisfy a

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<sup>576</sup> Bender (c) 2009: 251

<sup>577</sup> Jôganshiki, transl. by Snellen 1934: 166

certain reader or a group of readers. Moreover, as Dr. Brown further notes, *Shoku Nihongi* itself is not a completely objective text. After the second reign of Emperor Shôtoku (r. 764 – 770), it was Prince Shirakabe who became her successor and assumed the name Kônin. According to Brown, it was during his reign when the first signs of the weakening of the Imperial authority could be sensed.

“Although the *Shoku Nihongi*, as well as later historical accounts, depicts this enthronement of Prince Shirakabe as smooth and normal, historians now think of it as one of the sharpest and most significant political turns in the history of Japan. This view is based on historical evidence showing that the reign of Emperor Kônin (r. 770-781), as well as all later reigns (except for a short one in the 14th century), have been marked by a virtual absence of authoritarian control. From then on, secular affairs were handled by powerful clan leaders, retired Emperors, Shoguns, or elected officials. Thereafter, occupants of the throne have tended to hold only symbolic authority and to reign as high priests or priestesses of Japan's two interactive state religions. The effects of this sovereignty shift are reflected in much of Japan's cultural change since 770.

And yet, the *Shoku Nihongi* not only fails to notice or report on such a shift in Japanese sovereignty but reveals a consistent and conscious attempt to hide the shift. When reporting events after the Empress's death, this text includes almost nothing about what was said or done by any court official in those turbulent days. Nothing suggests the beginning of a new period in Japanese political history, or of a new type of political control. Instead, readers are presented with a picture of normality in which direct descendants of the Great Goddess Amaterasu continue to rule over the state of Japan.”<sup>578</sup>

From that point of view, the subjectivity of *Shoku Nihongi* is understandable. Regardless of the compilers' personal thoughts and views, both Fujiwara no Tsugutada and Sugano no Mamichi lived in an era in which the emperor had ultimate authority over the land and its people. Therefore, they surely regarded the ruler of the land as the embodiment of the deities' will on earth, a person to be respected and obeyed. In that context, it was unacceptable to officially narrate the shift of power described by Delmer Brown. If such a shift were to be recorded in a historical text, that simple action would have brought harm to the Imperial family and consequently to the pillars of the state to the point that chaos would have engulfed the whole land. From that point of view, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's two reigns could be considered the trigger for the changes which began to ensue during Kônin's reign. After all, she was an untypical sovereign in many ways. Firstly, she had been the sole female ruler with any actual political power during the period covered by *Shoku Nihongi*. Secondly, she had been, and remains so far, the only woman appointed to the position of Crown Prince in the history of the Japanese Imperial House. Thirdly, the way in which she reascended the throne had been unique due to the fact that she actually dethroned Emperor Junnin in order to take back her Imperial position. And last but not least, the so-called Dôkyô Incident in which it was believed that a Buddhist monk tried to usurp the throne encouraged by his close connection with the emperor could also be seen by many as the first sign of the weakening of the Imperial authority. Therefore, it should be no wonder if the narrative of the reigns of Kôken/Shôtoku is either biased or kept only to the bare minimum without extensive explanations.

In sum, one could assume that despite being *Nihonshoki's* “successor” *Shoku Nihongi* is not as objective as it should have been. It was influenced, firstly, by its compilers who had different backgrounds and views, and, secondly, by the expectations of the society and the meaning of the Imperial family for the stability of the state. Nevertheless, despite that downside, the continuation of

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<sup>578</sup> Brown (b) 2006

Nihonshoki still remains the most complete chronicle of the reigns of the emperors from the middle and late Nara period. Although, as it was noted, it is absolutely possible for the narratives of the two reigns of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku to not be as detailed as those of her father, for example, they still provide the reader with the Imperial edicts proclaimed by the last female ruler of Nara Japan. In them, one could see how the emperor preferred to portray herself to both her subjects and the future generations. With the last sentence in mind, the general portrayal of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku in Shoku Nihongi should be analyzed in two parts: the description of her reign as narrated by the authors – that is the records of her travels, of her change of residences, and of all other things noted as significant throughout her reigns – and the last female emperor of Nara Japan’s own depiction as reflected in her Imperial edicts.

Shoku Nihongi’s chronicles of Kōken/Shōtoku

As it was previously mentioned, after Shōmu’s illness in 745, the emperor finally decided to return to Heijō-kyō and turned even more toward Buddhism. The end result of his actions was his abdication in Tenpyō shōhō 1 (749). In his last edict, Shōmu officially recognized Crown Prince Abe as his rightful successor with the words “...we have appointed Our child the Princess to the High Throne of the Heavenly Sun Succession, according to the law.”<sup>579</sup> Following these words, Emperor Shōmu took the tonsure, thus becoming the first Japanese sovereign to become a Buddhist monk after abdication, and moved to Yakushiji Temple where he lived until his death in 756. His daughter was enthroned shortly thereafter. According to Shoku Nihongi, the new emperor received the New Year’s greetings for Tenpyō shōhō 2 (750) in the formal audience hall (Daianden) at Heijō-kyō after which she moved to Ōgōri no miya.

「天平勝宝二年（七五〇）正月庚寅朔」二年春正月庚寅朔。天皇御大安殿、受朝。』是日。車駕還大郡宮。」

*[Tenpyō shōhō 2 (750), 2<sup>nd</sup> month (27<sup>th</sup> of the sexagenary cycle), 1<sup>st</sup> day. The Emperor held audience at the Daianden. On the same day, she left in her palanquin for Ōgōri no miya.]*<sup>580</sup>

The location of the said Ōgōri Palace is unknown, but, according to Takagi Kiyoko, a possible theory is that it was situated near Yamato Kōriyama in northern Nara.<sup>581</sup> The reason for the emperor’s departure from the Imperial Palace is unknown. Takagi speculates that the repair works on the grounds of the Imperial Palace at Heijō-kyō were the most likely reason for Kōken’s stay at that other palace, and that situation also made the performance of the Daijōsai (enthronement ceremony, 大嘗祭) in the Imperial Palace impossible. Thus, the new ruler had to perform those rites at the palace gardens in Kōriyama. While it is doubtful whether the ceremony would have been held in the Imperial Palace at Heijō-kyō, on the grounds of which repair works were in progress, the presentation of the facts without clearing up the reason for Kōken’s change of residences leaves room for speculation. According to some, the performance of the Daijōsai outside the Imperial Palace’s grounds could only have happened because the emperor was a woman<sup>582</sup>, thus insinuating that, due to a female ruler being in no way equal to a male sovereign, it was also normal for the ceremonies to not be held in accordance with the custom.

The next notable mention of Emperor Kōken is in regard to the eye-opening ceremony of the Daibutsu at Tōdaiji. Similar to her father, the female sovereign was also a devoted supporter of Buddhism.

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<sup>579</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (i) 2012: 19

<sup>580</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō shōhō] 2.1

<sup>581</sup> See Takagi 2018: 196

<sup>582</sup> See Takagi 2018: 196/197

Therefore, after her enthronement in 749, she continued Shōmu's policy of emphasizing her faith. Thus, her first task was the completion of the big Buddha statue at Tōdaiji which eventually was erected in Tenpyō shōhō 4 (752). According to Shoku Nihongi,

“《天平勝宝四年（七五二）四月乙酉【丁丑朔九】》夏四月乙酉。盧舍那大仏像成。始開眼。」是日行幸東大寺。天皇親率文武百官。設齋大会。”

*[Tenpyō shōhō 4 (752), 4<sup>th</sup> month, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the sexagenary cycle. [14<sup>th</sup> year of the sexagenary cycle, 9<sup>th</sup> month]. Summer, 4<sup>th</sup> month, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the sexagenary cycle. The big statue of Rushana Buddha was erected. The eye-opening ceremony was conducted. On that day, the Emperor, her parents, many masters of the pen and sword and all the officials went to Tōdaiji Temple. A big purification ceremony was conducted.]*<sup>583</sup>

As it could be seen, the first big task which the new emperor saw to an end had been a religious one. Although the Daibutsu was commissioned by Shōmu, it was eventually his daughter and successor on the throne who completed it. Of course, the Retired Emperor and his wife Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi were also present, but it was after all Emperor Kōken who played the main role, as she was the sitting sovereign. That was also the first big event in the presence of many scholars and all court officials. It was the perfect opportunity for the new emperor to strengthen her position.

That initial demonstration of Kōken's Buddhist faith was followed by other similar deeds. The emperor supported many provincial temples, commissioned the construction of new ones and ordered the translation of sutras and Buddhist texts, among which the Lotus Sutra, Avatamska sutra (kegon-kyō), Human King Sutra (ninnogyō), Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light Sutra (konkōmyō saishō-kyō) and Brahmajala sutra (bonmō-kyō) took central place.<sup>584</sup> Seemingly, even her foreign policies were navigated by her religious ardor. According to Shoku Nihongi's entry from Tenpyō shōhō 6 (754), the envoy to Tang China, Ōtomo no Sukune Komaro, returned to Japan on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month accompanied by the Buddhist monk Jianzhen (Jap. Ganjin).

“入唐副使從四位上大伴宿禰古麻呂來歸。唐僧鑑真。”

*[Junior Upper fourth rank Ōtomo Sukune no Komaro sent as deputy delegate to Tang came back accompanied by the monk Ganjin.]*<sup>585</sup>

The said monk was first invited to Japan by Emperor Kōken's father in 742. Due to bad weather and political strife, however, his voyage failed many times. At the time when Jianzhen was finally able to safely reach the Japanese soil, he was already blind from an infection. Despite that, he was treated respectfully and in 759, a permission was given for him to found Tōshōdaiji Temple. Eventually, Jianzhen remained in Japan until his death. He was the one who ordained Retired Emperor Shōmu and his wife Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi.

As it could be seen after reading the abovementioned Shoku Nihongi chronicles, the first impression of Emperor Kōken is created with narratives of her change of residences almost immediately after her enthronement, the reason for which raises many speculations, and her religious devotion. The entries after that, however, add another layer to her portrayal, as they show the sovereign as a loyal daughter. While it could be expected that Retired Emperor Shōmu supported the new ruler of the state with

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<sup>583</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō shōhō] 4.4.9

<sup>584</sup> See Takagi 2018: 201

<sup>585</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō shōhō] 6.1.16

advice on political matters, that period surely did not last long, as his condition worsened in 755. At that time, it was Kôken who took care of her father, thus demonstrating filial piety toward her ailing parent.

“太上天皇、枕席不安。寢膳乖宜。朕窃念茲。情深惻隱。其救病之方。唯在施惠。延命之要。莫若濟苦。宜大赦天下。其犯八虐。故殺人。私鑄錢。強盜・窃盜。[…]”

*[The Retired Emperor was confined to bed. He refused food and couldn't sleep. Due to Our deep compassionate feelings We wished to stay by his side in hope to ease his illness. However, the healers could only share their wisdom with Us that for Our wish to be fulfilled and for his life to be prolonged one must not make him suffer. For example, forgiveness was to be given to criminals, such as murderers, counterfeiters, robbers and thieves.]<sup>586</sup>*

Nevertheless, the Retired Emperor died in 756 at the Imperial Palace at Heijô-kyô<sup>587</sup>, thus leaving Emperor Kôken without his support.

The following years of Emperor Kôken's reign seemed to have been uninteresting for the compilers of Shoku Nihongi. The most chronicles, with the exception of her edicts which will be discussed in the next chapter, concern her visits to temples or the elevation of one or another courtier in rank – things more or less normal during one's reign.

Interestingly enough, Shoku Nihongi's chronicles from the year 772 narrate an event connected with Retired Emperor Kôken which supposedly took place in 761. According to the entry,

“道鏡。俗姓弓削連。河内人也。略涉梵文。以禪行聞。由是入内道場列為禪師。宝字五年。從幸保良。時侍看病稍被寵幸。廢帝常以為言。与天皇不相中得。”

*[Dôkyô, secular surname Yuge no Muraji, from the province Kawachi. He was well versed in Sanskrit and well known for his Zen meditation practices. As a result, he entered the Inner practice hall [on the Imperial palace grounds] and was honored as a Zen master (zenshi). In the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Hôji [Tenpyô hôji] the Emperor visited [the] Hora [Palace]. During her stay there, the Emperor became ill and was nursed by Dôkyô until she recovered. Thus, he won her favor. The Dethroned Emperor spoke with her about him and in response lost her friendship and support.]<sup>588</sup>*

Thus, it could be assumed that the year Tenpyô hôji 5 was faithful for Retired Emperor Kôken due to her encounter with the Buddhist monk Dôkyô.

According to a Shoku Nihongi chronicle in regard to the monk's younger brother Kiyohito<sup>589</sup>, the two siblings came from the Wakae District in the province Kawachi. Their parents' names are unknown and little is known about the Yuge clan to which they belonged. Yokota Ken'ichi argues that Dôkyô's and Kiyohito's clan could have been the same Yuge clan which specialized in bow-making and whose members had been regarded as low-class aristocrats.<sup>590</sup> Coincidentally, Sendai kuji hongji, also known as Kujiki, a chronicle compiled around the 7<sup>th</sup> century either by a Mononobe clan member or by

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<sup>586</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyô shôhō] 7.10.21

<sup>587</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyô shôhō] 8.5.2

<sup>588</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝龜 [Hōki] 3.4.7

<sup>589</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天応 [Ten'ō] 1.6.18

<sup>590</sup> See Yokota 1988: 32/33

someone commissioned by them to do it<sup>591</sup>, also describes a certain Yuge (bow-making) clan associated with the Mononobe. According to it, some of the Mononobe leaders even married daughters from the Yuge clan.<sup>592</sup> Another entry even narrates that Mononobe no Moriya, the famous family head from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, was even called Yuge no Ô-muraji.<sup>593</sup> On the other hand, a certain Nihonshoki's entry explains that Soga no Emishi's grandmother had been the younger sister of Mononobe no Moriya<sup>594</sup>. Thus, a connection could be found between the Yuge clan, the Mononobe clan and the Soga clan. And while it is unclear whether the Yuge family from the old chronicles is the same as that of the monk Dôkyô, it nevertheless leaves room for speculation. According to one such unproved theory<sup>595</sup>, for example, a daughter born of a marriage between Soga and Mononobe was eventually married off to Emperor Tenji's son Prince Shiki. Supposedly, Dôkyô was the child born to the prince from the latter's Soga-Mononobe wife.<sup>596</sup> Interestingly enough, however, the Buddhist monk's birth is not the only aspect of his life shrouded in mystery. The same could be said about his youth. There are certain theories about his teachers or the scope of his education, some saying that he was taught by Michi no Mahito Toyonaga who was later involved in the infamous Dôkyô Incident, or by Abbot Gien, but none of them could be officially proved. The best information about the monk's educational prowess is the Shoku Nihongi chronicle which reports of his knowledge of Sanskrit and of Zen meditational practices. The nature of those techniques could be closely tracked back to Tang China Buddhism. It is said that the practices offered solace and healed melancholy and uneasiness by means of sutra chanting and Buddhist practices. There is information that Dôkyô became acquainted with these methods during his stay at Mount Katsuragi. Additionally, there he also mastered the Mahamayuri sutra (Mahamayuri is a bodhisattva and female Wisdom King in Mahayana Buddhism who is also known as the "Queen of the secret sciences" and the "Godmother of Buddha").<sup>597</sup> Moreover, as Ross Bender points out, Mount Katsuragi was also famous as a center of the so-called "isolated sitting": a meditation practice which strived for acquisition of supernatural powers.<sup>598</sup> Therefore, it could be assumed that Dôkyô had a vast knowledge of esoteric Buddhism. Anyway, based on the abovementioned information or the lack thereof, it could be concluded that nothing in the Buddhist monk's origins or early life indicated his rapid rise to power after his encounter with Emperor Kôken. The only faint clue could probably be found in *Dainippon kobunsho* (Vol. 5, pp. 238) where his handwriting is preserved. As Yokota Ken'ichi narrates, Dôkyô's penmanship reveals him as an educated man with vast knowledge and a strong character, who is also ambitious enough to strive for high positions in the clergy and, as history showed, also in politics.<sup>599</sup>

Anyway, according to the information in *Shoku Nihongi's* entry, Dôkyô and Retired Emperor Kôken first met in 761. At the time, he was in his fifties, while she was in her forties. It is explained that the monk was appointed as an inner offerer at the Inner practice hall on the grounds of the Imperial Palace (内道場; *naidôjô*). The inner offerers (内供奉; *naigubu*) were ten high-ranking Buddhist monks with vast wisdom and knowledge who were chosen to serve the Imperial family as healers. Considering the

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<sup>591</sup> See *Sendai kuji hongî*, transl. by Bentley 2006: 12, 112/117

<sup>592</sup> See 先代旧事本紀 [*Sendai Kuji Hongi*], Vol. 5, 天孫本紀 [*Tenson hongî*]

<sup>593</sup> See 先代旧事本紀 [*Sendai Kuji Hongi*], Vol. 5, 天孫本紀 [*Tenson hongî*]

<sup>594</sup> See 日本書紀 [*Nihonshoki*], Chapter 24, 天豊財重日足姫天皇 皇極天皇 [*Ame Toyo-takara Ikashi-hi Tarashi-hime-tennô Kôgyoku-tennô*]

<sup>595</sup> See Yokota 1988: 42/43

<sup>596</sup> See Sakaguchi (b) 1988: 10/11

<sup>597</sup> See Yokota 1988: 69/70

<sup>598</sup> See Bender (d) 1979: 138

<sup>599</sup> See Yokota 1988: 92



structure of the two sentences which describe Dôkyô's abilities and his appointment, it could be concluded that the monk's entry into the Imperial Palace was not connected with Retired Emperor Kôken. The latter sentence begins with the word 由 ("yoshi", or "yui"; "as a result of which") which indicates that Dôkyô's position as an inner offerer was the result of his knowledge of Sanskrit and Zen meditational practices, and not due to Kôken's favor. Only after that, does the chronicle narrate that Dôkyô's healing abilities helped him to win the Retired Emperor's favor. Interestingly enough, the narrative indicates that Kôken and the Buddhist monk did not have any encounters prior to the Retired sovereign's visit to Hora no miya. Only after Dôkyô helped her to recover, did he win her favor. Thus, it could even be speculated that if it had not been for Kôken's illness, the encounter between her and the Buddhist monk would not have happened.

Now, Shoku Nihongi's chronicle doesn't give any information about the nature of the Retired Emperor's ailment. Considering that she abdicated in 758, it could be assumed that she didn't have much to do thereafter. In her abdication edict which would be discussed in the next chapter, she explained that she wanted to take care of her sick mother. However, Kômyôshi died in 760, thus leaving her daughter alone. Later edicts of Emperor Shôtoku reveal that she didn't have an especially close relationship with her half sisters, the Imperial Princesses Fuwa and Inoe. Considering the events in her private life as well as Dôkyô's area of expertise, it could be assumed that Retired Emperor Kôken was not physically but rather psychologically ill. Takinami Sadako also supports that theory by expressing the opinion that Dôkyô most likely used methods explained in the Chinese text *Xiuyaojing* in order to ease Kôken's uneasiness.<sup>600</sup> Based on Indian astrology, the *Xiuyaojing* analysed the influence of the stars (more specifically the zodiac, the seven luminaries and the 28 constellations) on the lucky and the unlucky days, and on the human fate.<sup>601</sup>

Anyway, regardless of the nature of Retired Emperor Kôken's illness, according to the chronicle, it was the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who eventually helped her to regain her health. Thanks to that, he was able to win her favor (寵幸, chôkô). On the other hand, it seems that the "favor" eventually led to a disagreement between Emperor Junnin, called "the Dethroned Emperor" (廢帝 "haitei") in the chronicle, and Retired Emperor Kôken. Much could be speculated about the reason for the strife between them. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that the worsened relationship between Junnin and Kôken was a result only of the latter's encounter with Dôkyô. Rather, it was a mixture of several factors which will be briefly noted here and discussed in detail in the next chapter. Firstly, it was likely that Kôken didn't abdicate of her own volition, but was rather pressured into doing so by Prince Ôi's adoptive father Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Even though she was intelligent enough to understand that the prince who was enthroned as her successor under the name Junnin was simply a puppet (a "robot" as Yokota Ken'ichi calls him<sup>602</sup>) in Nakamaro's hands, she was a human after all. It was highly unlikely that Kôken didn't have any ill feelings toward the new emperor who replaced her. Secondly, by seeing Nakamaro's growing political power and his handling of the new ruler, Kôken understood that it was impossible for her to rid the political scene of her cousin without a clash with the sitting sovereign who was skillfully used by Nakamaro as a shield against her. Thirdly, as ambitious and strong-willed as she was, it was difficult to believe that at the age of 44 or 45 she would just sit idly by, do nothing and wait for her life to come to an end. Seeing the political situation after her abdication, Kôken surely began to aspire to return to the position of sitting sovereign. She already had an example in the face of Kôgyoku/Saimei: a woman like her who had ascended the throne two times.

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<sup>600</sup> See Takinami 1998: 138

<sup>601</sup> See Pringle: *The Buddhist Route for Transmission of Days of the Week: Esoteric Buddhism and Astrology*

<sup>602</sup> See Yokota 1988: 25

Moreover, after her mother's death in 760, Kôken wasn't restrained by the fact that she had to take care of the Empress Dowager, and was free to act however she wanted. Dôkyô's fault in the whole situation was that he met her during her stay at Hora no miya and through his astrological knowledge, gave the Retired Emperor the confidence that her wishes could come true. She surely would have acted regardless of whether Dôkyô had showed up in her life or not. But his knowledge combined with his authority as a Buddhist monk and an inner offerer gave her the deciding push forward. On the other hand, it could be speculated that Emperor Junnin also was well acquainted with the scope of Dôkyô's knowledge and his area of expertise. Considering that Junnin saw how the monk helped the Retired Emperor by making her a horoscope, the possibility could not be excluded that the sitting sovereign actually feared for his own position. As it was already mentioned, the horoscope which Dôkyô specialized at could predict one's fate based on different factors such as the zodiac or the position of the constellations. At that time, such methods of seeing one's future were especially popular among the nobles. Considering that Kôken also used it, it could be assumed that the members of the Imperial House were not immune to such beliefs. After finding out that the Retired Emperor wanted to learn her future, Junnin could have come to the conclusion that she sought a way to take the throne from him. At the same time, it seemed that the sitting sovereign was not the only one who feared the long-lasting contact between the Retired Emperor and Dôkyô. Without doubt, Fujiwara no Nakamaro was also afraid of a union between an ambitious retired ruler and a fanatical Buddhist monk. Such a combination could have ruined his hold on the court and the politics. Therefore, it could be assumed that Junnin was strongly supported by Fujiwara no Nakamaro in his intention to speak with Kôken in regard to her relationship with Dôkyô.

The next chronicle from the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) could be regarded as a continuation of the events from 761. It reads:

“高野天皇与帝有隙。於是。車駕還平城宮。帝御于中宮院。高野天皇御于法華寺。”

*[Emperor Takano broke relations with His Majesty the Emperor. Then, both returned to the capital. His Majesty stayed at the palace of the Empress. Emperor Takano stayed at Hokkeji Temple.]*<sup>603</sup>

The first thing which should be noted here is the way in which the Retired Emperor is called: “Emperor Takano”. She was continuously called thus in the Shoku Nihongi chronicles after her abdication in 758, throughout the reign of Emperor Junnin and during her second reign as Emperor Shôtoku from 764 to 770. Considering that her official Imperial name in the period 749 – 758 was 宝字称徳孝謙皇帝 (Hôji Shôtoku Kôken Kôtei) which could be roughly translated as “The treasured, benevolent, humble and filial emperor”), while Takano no misasagi (高野山陵) was the name of Kôken/Shôtoku's mausoleum, there surely would have been a reason for the choice of a burial place as a name for a ruler who ascended the throne for a second time. Kojiruien's article on Imperial posthumous names sheds some light on how the names of the emperors were created and gives an explanation for the source of the name “Emperor Takano”.

“諡号に二種あり、基一お国風諡と為す、文武天皇の朝に、持統太上天皇に諡して大倭根子天之広野日女尊と称し奉る是なり、此外文武、聖武、光仁、桓武、平城、淳和の六天皇、並に国風諡あり、孝謙天皇天平勝宝八載、聖武太上天皇崩じ給ふ、勅して

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<sup>603</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 6.5.23

日く、太上天皇出家仏に帰す、更に諡お奉らずと、又孝謙天皇紀の首にも、宝字称徳孝謙皇帝の生前尊号お標して、出家仏に帰す、更に諡お奉らず、因て宝字二年、百官上る所の尊号お取て之れお称すとあり、国風諡お奉上せざるお雲ふなり[...] 基制大宝令に始て見えたり、公式令に天皇諡の目ありて、義解に、諡は生時の行跡お累て死後の称と為す、即ち天地お経緯するお文と為し、乱お撥き正に反すお武と為す類お雲ふとあり、是全く漢土の制に効へる故に、今日して漢風諡と雲ふ、[...] 又漢諡に一帝二諡の例あり、皇極天皇の再祚に斉明と称し奉る是なり、此後孝謙天皇の再祚に称徳の称あれども、是れ生前の一尊号お前後に分称せしものにして、一帝二諡の例にはあらざるなり、御在所号あり、世に之れお院号と雲ふ、[...] 故に今之お此に収む、基漢風尊号は、孝謙天皇お宝字称徳孝謙皇帝と称し奉れる是なり、世之れお分称して、基前位に孝謙と称し、基再祚に称徳と称し奉れり、”

*[There are two kinds of posthumous names: one based on the national customs and manners, such as that of the Retired Emperor Jitô, to whom the posthumous name Ôyama-to-nekoame-no-hiro-no-hime-no mikoto was given during the reign of Emperor Monmu. Other than that, the six Emperors Monmu, Shômu, Kônin, Kanmu, Heizei and Junna had all posthumous names based on the national customs and manners. However, in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Tenpyô-shôho during Emperor Kôken's reign, Retired Emperor Shômu died and an imperial edict was issued which read that the Retired Emperor was a Buddhist monk, which meant that no traditional posthumous name was given to him. Also, in Emperor Kôken's chapter, there was the honorary title Hôji-shôtoku-kôken-kôtei to be found which was used during the Emperor's lifetime, the reason for that being that she was a Buddhist and thus, a traditional posthumous name was not given to her. For that reason, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Hôji, it became only appropriate that an Emperor would be called by his honorary title and no traditional name would be given to him. [...] Its basis seemed to have begun with the Taihô-ritsuryô where one could find in the Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter Kushiki-ryô concerning the Imperial names that one's behavior during one's lifetime was to be reflected in the posthumous name after one's death. In other words, it should be a sentence reflecting one's particular nature, for example, one which reflected one's discontent with disorder and one's fondness for righteousness and bravery. The result of that complete turn to the Chinese system was that nowadays one regards those Chinese-style names as standard [...] On the other hand, there are examples of one emperor with two Chinese-style posthumous names: Emperor Kôgyoku was named Saimei after she ascended the throne for a second time; after her, Emperor Kôken was named Shôtoku at the time of her second ascension. However, as the honorary title had to be divided in two, it was impossible for one emperor to have with two posthumous names. For such reasons, such emperors were named either after their residence, or posthumous Buddhist names were given to them. [...] Therefore, the traditional Chinese-style honorary title of Emperor Kôken was Hôji-shôtoku-kôken-kôtei which later was divided for her two reigns accordingly: during her first reign she was known as Kôken, after her second ascension, she was called Shôtoku.]<sup>604</sup>*

<sup>604</sup> 古事類苑 [Kojiruien]: 帝王部十六 諡号 [Teiô-bu jûroku shigô]

Thus, it could be assumed that the name “Emperor Takano” could not be regarded as an offence toward Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Such was the standard way of calling a ruler who ascended the throne two times, as he/she could not have two posthumous names.

The second notable thing in the chronicle from Tenpyô hôji 6 is the way in which the sitting sovereign Emperor Junnin is called. The character used in the entry is that of “Mikado” (帝), meaning “sovereign” or “emperor”. According to Ross Bender, that was “*Another indication of Junnin’s questionable status... Kôken is never so labeled.*”<sup>605</sup> While at first sight there seems to be nothing wrong with the way in which Emperor Junnin is called, it is also true that Kôken had always been referred to as “tennô” (“heavenly sovereign”, 天皇). The same could also be said about her predecessors – the emperors Genshō and Shōmu.<sup>606</sup> The tendency to refer to Junnin as “Mikado” was continued by Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku herself as she called him so in her Imperial edicts. Therefore, it seems that the said title was regarded as denigrating both by Shoku Nihongi’s compilers and by Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. By deliberately giving Junnin not the title of “heavenly sovereign”, but simply “sovereign”, it was most likely hinted that despite him having been the sitting sovereign, he was not a ruler chosen by the Heavens. As it was already mentioned, Prince Ôi was enthroned as Emperor Junnin due to the strong support of his father-in-law and adoptive father Fujiwara no Nakamaro. During his reign, the Fujiwara family and Nakamaro, in particular, reached the peak of their influence and power at court during the Nara period. Considering the fact that one of Shoku Nihongi’s compilers was member of the said family, one could wonder why a sovereign who strongly favored the Fujiwara was portrayed so negatively. The reason for that could be seen after closer examination of the ties between Fujiwara no Nakamaro and his older brother Toyonari, who also happened to have been Fujiwara no Tsugutada’s father.

Some sources, among them Shoku Nihongi and Nihon Ôdai Ichiran (a 17<sup>th</sup>-century genealogy), reveal that the relationship between the two siblings was, in the best case, strained. According to Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, the two brothers were at odds since Nakamaro’s rise to the position of Shibinaishō and Toyonari’s (in)direct participation in the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro.

*“In the 5<sup>th</sup> month, the empress stayed at Tamura-no-miya, the residence of Fujiwara no Nakamaro, and elevated him to the rank of Shibinaishō (Tsu vvei nci siang), or Supreme Military Official, position equivalent to that of Minister. Toyonari, elder brother of Nakamaro, was only Dainagon; and as the latter was elevated to such a high office due to the Emperor’s favor toward him, Toyonari developed an irreconcilable hatred toward his brother. Both were grandsons of Fuhito and sons of Muchimaro.*

*Jealous of Nakamaro’s influence, Naramaro, son of Tachibana no Moroe, conspired with Otomo no Komaro, to assassinate Nakamaro and to elevate Prince Funado to the position of Crown Prince once more. Fujiwara no Toyonari was informed about this, but he did not reveal the plot. Nakamaro, upon hearing of it, became very angry. He told the Emperor what was going on and the heads of the two conspirators were cut off. Prince Funado was likewise put to death and Toyonari, for having known of the plot without denouncing it, was banished to Tsukushi.”<sup>607</sup>*

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<sup>605</sup> Bender 2021: 62

<sup>606</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyô shōhō] 1.7.2 【S 1 4】

<sup>607</sup> See Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

Retired Emperor Kōken's Imperial edict from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 8 (764)<sup>608</sup>, that is two days after the chronicle describing the events which eventually led to Nakamaro's death, further narrates the bad relationship between the brothers Toyonari and Nakamaro:

*"[...] Thus he deceived and slandered his elder brother Toyonari so that for the last few years Toyonari has been deprived of rank. However, Nakamaro's deception now being clear, We return Toyonari to his position as Great Minister as formerly – let all hear and understand this.[...]"*<sup>609</sup>

As it could be seen, there seems to not have been any brotherly feelings between Fujiwara no Toyonari and Fujiwara no Nakamaro. It was highly likely that Toyonari's son Tsugutada knew of his father's deep antipathy toward his uncle. From that point of view, it could be assumed that Tsugutada most certainly didn't want to describe his father's enemy or the enemy's supporters in a good light. As a result, the word "mikado" used in regard to Emperor Junnin was deliberately chosen as a sign of disrespect for the ruler who supported Fujiwara no Nakamaro and his policy.

The next important chronicle in regard to Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku could be interpreted as a consequence of the strife between the Retired Emperor and the sitting sovereign.

“御大極殿受朝。文武百寮。及高麗蕃客。各依儀拜賀。”<sup>610</sup>

*[The Emperor held court at the Daigokuden<sup>611</sup>; the officials and Koma (Korean) ambassadors did homage . . .]*<sup>612</sup>

While an entry narrating the emperor holding court at the Imperial Palace would have seemed a normal part of the everyday life of the said sovereign and therefore something not worth mentioning, the case above is important because of the year in which the said audience took place. In 763, Kōken/Shōtoku was still a Retired Emperor, while the sitting sovereign was Emperor Junnin. From that point of view, a chronicle narrating that the Retired Emperor had actually overtaken the functions of the emperor is far from ordinary. The answer to that controversy could be found in an Imperial edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tempyō hōji 6 (762) (to be discussed later) in which Kōken announced that she would take care of all important state matters, while Junnin would carry out only

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<sup>608</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 8.9.20 【 S 2 8 】

<sup>609</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 45

<sup>610</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 7.1

<sup>611</sup> The Daigokuden (Imperial Audience Hall) was the most impressive ceremonial hall on the grounds of the Nara Imperial Palace. It occupied the central side of the northern end of the palace enclosure which in turn was situated at the northern end of the city. It held many functions – from holding court meetings and official receptions for envoys from foreign countries up to seeing horse races or archer contests. Another important event which took place there was the so-called accession ceremony (sokui no shikiten, 即位式典). The Daigokuden was a building of enormous size, approaching the dimensions of the Great Buddha Hall of Tōdaiji in width and height, but it was considerably narrower. In its form and function, it resembled the lecture halls of many Buddhist monasteries from the period such as Hōryūji. On the other hand, the first Daigokuden and each one built after it, more or less, could have been considered a copy of the Chang'an (the Chinese capital) palace architecture. Thus, it could be assumed that the Great Audience Hall embodied the Buddhist principles and the Chinese culture and was an example of architectural and cultural genius. For a devout Buddhist and an ordained nun, on the one hand, and also a “pupil” of Emperor Wu Zetian, on the other hand, such as Retired Emperor Kōken, the Daigokuden surely felt like the embodiment of her aspirations and beliefs., See Coaldrake 1991: 42; 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝龜 [Hōki] 8.5.7; Lepekhova 2016: 58

<sup>612</sup> See Coaldrake 1991: 42

small duties, thus practically, albeit not officially, unseating him.<sup>613</sup> From that point of view, the said entry could be seen as a consequence of the political tension between the two emperors.

The next entry concerning an eventful event during Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's reign is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) and narrates the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro.

“太師藤原惠美朝臣押勝逆謀頗泄。高野天皇、遣少納言山村王。取中宮院鈴・印。押勝聞之。令其男訓儒麻呂等邀而奪之。天皇遣授刀少尉坂上菟田麻呂。將曹牡鹿嶋足等。射而殺之。押勝又遣中衛將監矢田部老。被甲騎馬。且劫詔使。授刀紀船守亦射殺之。”

*[Information was leaked that Taishi Emi Ason Oshikatsu plotted [against the Emperor] and wanted to rebel. Emperor Takano dispatched Shônagon Prince Yamamura to the Palace of the Empress (Chûgûin) in order to obtain the Bell and the Imperial Seal. Upon hearing about it, Oshikatsu ordered his man Kusumaro to meet the Prince [on his way back] and to take [the Imperial objects] by force. However, the Emperor [Takano] dispatched Second Lieutenant [of the Imperial Guard] Sakanoue no Karitamaro and shôsô [a member of the Imperial Guard] Oshika no Shimatari after Kusumaro and he was killed by their arrows. Oshikatsu then sent the chûei-shôgen [Middle Guard, the 3<sup>rd</sup> rank in the Imperial Guard] in full armor and on a horse to take [the Bell and the Imperial Seal]. The Imperial envoy Ki no Funamori was dispatched and fell victim to the arrows of Nakamaro's allies.]<sup>614</sup>*

As in the case of Tachibana no Naramaro's rebellion (to be discussed in the next chapter), the whole incident extends throughout several days. Eventually, the narrative concludes with the chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764).

“軍士石村村主石楯斬押勝、伝首京師。押勝者。近江朝内大臣藤原朝臣鎌足曾孫。平城朝贈太政大臣武智麻呂之第二子也。[……]時道鏡常侍禁掖。甚被寵愛。押勝患之、懷不自安。乃諷高野天皇。為都督使。掌兵自衛。准拋諸国試兵之法。管内兵士每国廿人。五日為番。集都督衛。簡閱武芸。奏聞畢後。私益其數。用太政官印而行下之。大外記高丘比良麻呂、懼禍及己。密奏其事。及取中宮院鈴・印。遂起兵反。其夜。相招党与。遁自宇治。奔拋近江。山背守日下部子麻呂。衛門少尉佐伯伊多智等。直取田原道。先至近江。燒勢多橋。押勝、見之失色。即便走高嶋郡。而宿前少領角家足之宅。是夜、有星。落于押勝臥屋之上。其大如甕。伊多智等、馳到越前国。斬守辛加知。押勝不知、而偽立塩燒。為今帝。真光・朝獵等、皆為三品。余各有差。遣精兵數十、而入愛発関。授刀物部広成等拒而却之。押勝進退失拋。即乘船向浅井郡塩津。忽有逆風。船欲漂没。於是、更取山道。直指愛発。伊多智等拒之。八九人中箭而亡。押勝即又還。到高嶋郡三尾崎。与佐伯三野。大野真本等。相戰、從午及申。官軍疲頓。于時。從五位下藤原朝臣藏下麻呂將兵忽至。真光引衆而退。三野等乘之。殺傷稍多。押勝遙望衆敗。乘船而亡。”

<sup>613</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 6.6.3

<sup>614</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.11

*[The Imperial soldier Ishimura Suguri no Iwatate beheaded Oshikatsu and sent his head to the capital. Oshikatsu was the great-grandson of the governor of Ômi Fujiwara Ason Kamatari, second son of Muchimaro who was given the position Dajô-daijin by the Heijô Court. [...] Positions of too great prominence and dignity were also given to their relatives so that they single-handedly hold too much power and had to defend themselves against the envy of the others. At that time, Dôkyô simply waited on [Emperor Takano] by staying by her side, and thus received her favor. Oshikatsu was so affected by it that he became restless and let his feelings be known to Emperor Takano. He was appointed as totoku (governor-general) and was responsible for the self-defence [of the country]. According to law, military forces, the number of which should not go beyond twenty, were to be stationed in various provinces. Those soldiers should be changed occasionally and return to the capital for inspection of their martial arts. After hearing that, [Oshikatsu] wanted to use that to his advantage and used the Imperial Seal to [promulgate orders for mobilization]. However, Daigeki Takaoka no Hiramaro was struck with fear and disclosed [Oshikatsu's plan]. After that, the Imperial Seal and Bell were taken from the Chûgûin [the Empress' Palace] and forces were raised [against Oshikatsu]. On that night, many factions were beckoned to join [the Emperor's forces]. Oshikatsu fled to Uji and then to Ômi. In Yamashiro, Kusakabe no Komaro and the Junior Capitan of the Imperial forces Saeki no Itaji [who was on Oshikatsu's heels] directly crossed the plains and arrived at Ômi before him. Therefore, they burned the Seta Bridge. Upon seeing this, Oshikatsu became pale and fled to Takashima District where he chose to rest. That night, there were stars in the sky which seemed to fall on the potlike-roof of the place where Oshikatsu rested. Itaji galloped as fast as possible and reached Province Echizen where he beheaded [Oshikatsu's son] Shikachi. Oshikatsu, without knowing [about his son's death], proclaimed [Prince] Shioyaki the "current Emperor". His sons Masaki and Asakari were elevated in court rank. Ten elite soldiers reached Arachi no seki and the swordsman Mononobe no Hironari repelled Oshikatsu's advance thus leaving him without his stronghold. As a result, Oshikatsu took a boat and turned to the port in District Azakai. Suddenly, there was strong contrary wind and the boat was almost turned over. Therefore, [Oshikatsu decided to flee on land] and took different mountain ways on his way to Arachi. Itaji's forces repelled him and 89 people died in the arrow fight which ensued. Therefore, Oshikatsu returned to the District Takashima and built his base on the small peninsula of Sanbi. Saeki no Mino engaged in a fight with Ôno Mamoto. Around noon when all were exhausted from the battle, Junior Lower Fifth rank Fujiwara Ason Kurajimaro suddenly arrived. Masaki had to retreat and Mino, therefore, killed and wounded many [enemies]. Oshikatsu, upon seeing his defeat, wanted to flee in a boat, but was killed.]<sup>615</sup>*

The detailed description explains, among many other things, the reason for Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion. It is said that the Buddhist monk Dôkyô "simply waited on Emperor Takano", but it was namely that care which agitated Nakamaro to the point that he let his feelings be known to the Retired Emperor and eventually led him to the path of his own destruction. The narrative also elaborates on the information given by the entry from the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 3 (772) which reports the first encounter between Retired Emperor Kôken and Dôkyô. According to it, it was first Emperor Junnin who opposed the relationship between her and the Buddhist monk. From the second chronicle on the matter, it becomes clear that Junnin's father-in-law and adoptive father Fujiwara no Nakamaro also was against the communication between Kôken and the monk.

Interestingly enough, the entry emphasizes the fact that Dôkyô "simply waited on Emperor Takano" and as a result "received her favor" as if to deny any speculation about the relationship between him

<sup>615</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.18

and the Retired Emperor. In contrast to Shoku Nihongi's chronicle from the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 3 (772) in which the word chôkô (寵幸; "favor" or "grace") is used, in the current narrative one sees the word "chôai" (寵愛; "favor" or "affection") as a reference to the relationship between the Retired Emperor and the monk. The reason for that could have been rooted in potential speculations about the nature of Kôken's and Dôkyô's relationship. Moreover, an explanation that Dôkyô "*simply waited on Emperor Takano*" would have not been needed if everyone accepted the contact between the Retired Emperor and the Buddhist monk simply as a servant's service to his master/ruler. From that point of view, it could be speculated that the authors' purpose of utilizing the word "chôai" was for the readers to assume that someone saw benefits in spreading rumors about the nature of Kôken's and Dôkyô's relationship. Considering the fact that first Emperor Junnin and then Fujiwara no Nakamaro felt offended by the fact that the Retired Emperor communicated with the Buddhist monk, it could be said that they would have profited the most from potential rumors about her. After all, after the proclamation of her edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of 762 with which Kôken practically took all power from Emperor Junnin, both the sitting sovereign and his most powerful supporter Nakamaro had lost a big portion of their credibility. On the other hand, it should be considered that it surely would have been a disgrace to both the sitting emperor and his Prime Minister if it became known that they had been directly involved in slandering the former sovereign. Therefore, it could be assumed that the best strategy for them would have been to use someone else to do the dirty work.

Takinami Sadako points out an interesting peculiarity which could possibly shed some light on the speculations about the relationship between Kôken and Dôkyô. She explains that in 759, a Buddhist monk under the name Jikun (滋訓) from the same Kawachi Province as Dôkyô was appointed as shôsôzu (少僧都; the third rank in the hierarchy of the Buddhist clergy). He was 66 years old at the time, certainly much older than Dôkyô who was in his fifties. With the support of Nakamaro and Kômyôshi, he was appointed as bettô (head) of Yamashinaji Temple and played an important role in Nakamaro's Buddhist politics. Despite seemingly having been in a stronger hierarchical position than Dôkyô, Jikun was appointed as inner offerer at the Imperial Palace in 761, the same year in which the younger man entered the court.<sup>616</sup> Little is known about the personal relationship between the two men or whether Jikun had any direct contact with the Retired Emperor. A Shoku Nihongi chronicle from 763, however, narrates that a strife occurred between the two monks when Dôkyô replaced Jikun as the bettô of Yamashinaji Temple. The edict ordering the change explains that "*due to Jikun's performance of ceremonies without any reason and due to the lack of support from the Buddhist clergy, he is to be dismissed from his position*"<sup>617</sup>. At the same time, since 762, it was the Retired Emperor who took care of important state matters. While the reason for Jikun's dismissal had supposedly been the monk's neglect of his duties, one could also see it as a direct consequence of the clash between the Retired Emperor, on the one hand, and Emperor Junnin and Fujiwara no Nakamaro, on the other hand. At the same time, the dismissal of a monk from his position does not seem as the best way to challenge Nakamaro. Therefore, it could be assumed that there was another deeper meaning behind Jikun's discharge. Having been the monk's patron, it was probably easy for Fujiwara no Nakamaro to manipulate him and make him obey his orders. As an inner offerer at the Imperial Palace, Jikun's words would have had more credibility than those of uninvolved people. After all, the monk's position allowed him free entry to the grounds of the palace. Therefore, it could be assumed that the supposed

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<sup>616</sup> See Takinami 1998: 139

<sup>617</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 7.9.4



rumors about the immoral nature of the relationship between Dôkyô and Kôken/Shôtoku were actually spread by monk Jikun behind whom stood Fujiwara no Nakamaro and (indirectly) Emperor Junnin.

The next entry in regard to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku is dated to the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 1 (770), some time after Emperor Shôtoku's death, and reports of her commissioning the construction of one million small three-storied pagodas which were to contain printed parts of Buddhist sutras after the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion.

“初天皇。八年乱平。乃発弘願。令造三重小塔一百万基。高各四寸五分。基径三寸五分。露盤之下。各置根本。慈心。相輪。六度等陀羅尼。至是功畢。分置諸寺。賜供事官人已下仕丁已上一百五十七人爵。各有差。”<sup>618</sup>

*[After the uprising of the eighth year [of Tenpyô-hôji, i.e. 764] had been put down, the sovereign [Shôtoku] took a vow and ordered the construction of one million small three-storied pagodas, each 4 sun 5 bu [about 13.5 cms] in height and 3 sun 5 bu [about 10.5 cms] in diameter and containing underneath the upper part one of the Konpon, Jishin, Sôrin and Rokudo dhâraṇī. Once this had all been done, the pagodas were distributed to various temples. The officials and artisans who had been engaged in this work, one hundred and fifty-seven in all, were rewarded with increases in rank, according to station.]*<sup>619</sup>

The said collection remained in history under the name of Hyakumantô Darani. As it could be seen from the Shoku Nihongi chronicle, the order was issued after the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion in 764 and it could therefore be assumed that the newly enthroned Emperor Shôtoku commissioned the creation of the tiny pagodas<sup>620</sup> in order to justify her reascension to the throne. Another speculation is that Emperor Shôtoku wanted to impress the Buddhist clergy and thus created the huge number of miniature pagodas and distributed them among the ten leading Buddhist temples in the country.<sup>621</sup>

Peter Kornicki elaborates on the creation of the small pagodas using the information provided by Tôdaiji yôroku – a record of the Tôdaiji Temple dated to 1106 which, as Kornicki points out, relies on much older records.

“[...] On Tenpyô-hôji 8 [764].9.11 the monarch Kôken had one million small pagodas made and distributed to Ten Great Temples. Each one contained a printed Muku jôkô darani. (Oral tradition has it that this was in atonement for the deaths caused during the rebellion of Emi [no Oshikatsu]). (Tsutsui Eishun 1971, 25–26, 104)”<sup>622</sup>

The report also mentions an important fact: the darani put in the miniature pagodas were printed. Bryan Hickman explains that the single slips of paper<sup>623</sup> utilized in the printing process varied in length depending on the text reproduced (57 cm for Kompon, 43,9 cm for Rokudo). The width of the strip

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<sup>618</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.4.26

<sup>619</sup> Kornicki 2016: 46

<sup>620</sup> More information about the material and the process of creating the small pagodas could be found in Hickman 1975: 88/89; Sewell 2003: 121; pp. 338/341.

<sup>621</sup> See Hickman 1975: 88

<sup>622</sup> Kornicki 2016: 46

<sup>623</sup> See pp. 341; The text of the darani was printed in columns of five characters. At the beginning of each paper strap, the name of the sutra followed by the title of the particular darani could be found. The darani follow a certain order so much so that the Konpon darani had been always the first one to be printed, followed by the Sôrin, the Jishin'in and the Rokudo. That is actually the order in which the darani appear in the Muku Jôkô-kyô.

remains 5,45 cm for all four types.<sup>624</sup> Moreover, the Tōdaiji yōroku narrative clarifies that the Konpon, Jishin, Sōrin and Rokudō darani mentioned in the Shoku Nihongi's chronicle were, in fact, parts of the Muku Jōkō-kyō, a key darani sutra from the time of Emperor Shōtoku. The sutra was translated into Chinese by the Central Asian monk Mituo-xian between 680 and 704, in the closing years of Emperor Wu's reign. Its full Japanese title is Mukujōkō daidarani-kyō (Great Darani Sutra of the Pure and Immaculate Light). According to Mimi Yiengoruksawan,

“This sutra records a discourse delivered by the Buddha at Kapilavastu, the capital of his native kingdom, on the expiation of sin and the accumulation of religious merit through observance of six darani rituals centering on the construction and worship of pagodas.

The sutra opens with the story of a Kapilavastu Brahman who learned that he would die in seven days. Horrified, he sought out the Buddha and begged for a means to both lengthen his life and erase the effects of a lifetime of iniquity. The Buddha instructed that he repair a Kapilavastu pagoda that had fallen into ruin, construct a vast number of miniature pagodas, and observe six darani rituals in connection with these activities.”<sup>625</sup>

The six darani could be divided into two groups: the first one is the group of the “four great darani”, while the second group is that of the two darani to be recited during worship of darani-containing pagodas. To the first group belong the Root, or Fundamental, Darani (Konpon), the Darani of the Pagoda Finial (Sōrin), the Darani of Pagoda Repair, and the Darani of the Aspectless Self (Jishin). To the second group belong the Darani of the Lord of Incantation and the Darani of the Six Perfections (Rokudo). All these rituals were supposed to bring benefits to the one performing them. Among these, neutralization of the five deadly sins (parricide, matricide, murder of a monk, drawing Buddha's blood and disrupting the Buddhist order), closure of the gates of hell, nullification of passionate desire and jealousy, prolongation of life, and protection of the righteous monarch and kingdom could be listed.<sup>626</sup> Peter Kornicki fills in the full picture as he explains that,

*“People who wish to perform the ceremony for it should, on the 8th, 13th, 14th or 15th day of the month, walk round and round the pagoda containing the relics a full seventy-seven times, with it on their right, reciting this charm [dhāraṇī] also seventy-seven times: they should build an altar and keep its surface clean. They should have the charm copied out seventy-seven times, and out of respect for the ceremony should give the copyist perfume, flowers, food and drink, clean clothes and a bath, and reward him either by anointing and covering him with perfumes or by giving him much money, or by paying him according to his ability. Then they should take these copies of the charms, place them inside the pagoda, and make offerings at the pagoda. Alternatively they should make seventy-seven small clay pagodas, place one copy inside each, and make offerings. If they duly perform this, people who are about to die will prolong their lives to old age, all their previous sins and evil deeds being completely destroyed.*

The sūtra goes on to recommend that ‘anyone wishing to complete the six ways to salvation . . . should copy out ninety-nine copies of the first four above mentioned [dhāraṇī], make ninety-nine small pagodas, and insert a copy in each.’<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> The author also elaborates on the types of paper and the technology used for its creation (See Hickman 1975: 89/90).; The Cambridge University Library offers a collection of pictures containing both the pagodas and the darani (the slips of paper), see pp. 338/341.

<sup>625</sup> Yiengoruksawan 1987: 230

<sup>626</sup> See Yiengoruksawan 1987: 231

<sup>627</sup> Kornicki 2016: 47

All things considered, it could be understood why Emperor Shôtoku chose the Muku Jôkô-kyô as the basis sutra to be put in the miniature pagodas. Firstly, the sutra was one chosen by the only female emperor of China Wu Zetian. As it would also be seen from Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's Imperial edicts, in some aspects, especially in matters concerning justification strategies, the Chinese female emperor could be considered a teacher for her Japanese counterpart.<sup>628</sup> Secondly, the observation of the six darani rituals ensured protection of a monarch, as well as forgiveness of many sins and riddance of sinful desires and emotions. In the phrase used by Mimi Yiengoruksawan, the word "rightful" stands in combination with the word "monarch". For Emperor Shôtoku, a Buddhist nun who ascended the throne after having executed a close relative of hers (Nakamaro was her cousin), the sutra offered the perfect opportunity to pray to the Buddhist deities for forgiveness. It also gave her a chance to prove that she was the rightful monarch chosen by the Heavens. Moreover, the observance of all rituals ensured a longer life for the person adhering to them. For an emperor who, as it would later be seen, was not enthusiastic to choose a Crown Prince, that was the perfect opportunity to evade the questions of the courtiers. Moreover, according to the Imperial edicts narrating the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro, the minister accused Retired Emperor Kôken of a sinful relationship with the Buddhist monk Dôkyô so much so that it became one of the reasons for his rebellion. In that context, it could be said that by choosing the Muku Jôkô-kyô sutra to be put into the miniature pagodas Emperor Shôtoku was getting rid of the rumors about the relationship between her and the monk. As it was mentioned, the sutra ensured that "*passionate desires*" were taken from the person who observed the rituals and recited the darani. From that point of view, it could be assumed that by reciting the sutra, the emperor wanted to show that she was not afraid to be cleansed of her "desire" and potential "love" for Dôkyô.

Nevertheless, contrary to the expectation that Emperor Shôtoku would have been especially diligent in fulfilling the whole ritual as it was formulated in the scripture, that seems to not have been the case. According to Brian Hickman,

"Although the Muku Jôkô-kyô contains six dhârani, printed copies of only four (the Konpon, Sôrin, Jushin'in, and Rokudo) have been discovered, and if Hôryûji's holdings represent a complete cross-section of those produced, it must be assumed that only these four dhârani were printed. The temple at present preserves 27 copies of the Konpon, 27 Sôrin, 39 Jinshin'in, and 7 Rokudo."<sup>629</sup>

Emperor Shôtoku was a devout Buddhist to the point that she even took the tonsure and became a nun several years before her reascension to the throne. From that point of view, it would be hard to believe that she would not perform the ritual as it was stated in the sutra. Some evidence to sustain that assertion could be found in Shoku Nihongi's chronicle which narrates the creation of the pagodas. In the report about the production of the darani, the character "nado" (等; et cetera; and so forth) could be seen after the four darani are listed. Therefore, it could be assumed that copies of the other two darani were also produced but in not as big a quantity as the other four.

Speaking of the production of the darani, the most controversial aspect of the Hyakumantô darani seems to have been the method of printing.<sup>630</sup> There are three theories about the technique used to reproduct such a large number of printed texts: woodblock printing, the use of bronze or copper plates, and printing from a movable wooden type. Among those three methods, the last one seems highly unlikely in the eyes of the scientific world, since the possibility of the Japanese having invented the

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<sup>628</sup> See Lepekhova 2016: 58

<sup>629</sup> Hickman 1975: 89

<sup>630</sup> See Hickman 1975: 90

movable type before the Chinese is considered incredibly low (the latter were credited with the invention in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (1041 – 1049). At the same time, the woodblock-printing theory is heavily supported by the fact that there are two different printing styles to be found for three of the four darani, with one being slightly larger than the other. Furthermore,

“Certain examples include characters missed in the printing and later supplied by hand. The most obvious explanation is that some of the embossed characters had been broken off and must therefore have been made of wood and not of metal. On the other hand the omission of some characters could have been due to the negligence of the printer rather than to any breakage in the blocks.”<sup>631</sup>

Although it was supposed that the darani should not have been read after their printing, the passage indicates that someone had made the effort of examining the result before putting it into the pagodas. That aspect only shows how important the project was for the emperor and subsequently also for the people involved in it.

Last but not least, the main argument in support of the metal-plate theory is based on the actual appearance of the characters. If one examines the typeface of each darani, it becomes obvious that they lack the usual calligraphic touch which could be expected of the woodblock-printing method. As Brian Hickman points out,

“The overall appearance of the characters is most suggestive of metal-plate printing, for they appear brittle and of equal thickness. Some characters are certainly out of vertical and, in some cases, out of horizontal, as pointed out by those who favored the moveable-type theory, but this is perhaps due to poor carving when the mold blocks were cut.”<sup>632</sup>

If the theory about the utilization of a metal-plates for the printing of Hyakumantō darani turns out to be true, that would have been unique in more than one aspect. Firstly, since its first adoption, the said technique had not been used again in Japan until the end of the sixteenth century. Secondly, the darani remain the only examples of printed texts from Nara Japan. Other texts from that time were usually copied out by hand. Undoubtedly, that would also have been the case here if the number of the texts to be reproduced was not so big. Thirdly, as Peter Kornicki points out, the project was commissioned and financed by the state – beginning with the provision of the timber, going through the use of lathes to fashion the miniature pagodas, the provision of paper and ink, and ending with the use of the printing technology.<sup>633</sup> As Kornicki points out,

“In this respect the Hyakumantō darani resemble her father’s construction of the great statue of the Buddha in the Tōdaiji and of a massive building to house it, also undertaken by the state. Both of these were public and political acts and need to be understood as such. As the initiator of the Hyakumantō darani Shōtoku is thus akin to Balthild, the Merovingian queen who is said to have ‘grasped the uses of piety, both as a means to secure personal status and as a political instrument’. It is not easy to appreciate the difficulties faced by women on the throne in early East Asia who had to deal with an exclusively male bureaucracy, but the example of Balthild suggests that Shōtoku’s motives may indeed have been concerned with securing her personal status as a woman ruler and using Buddhism as a political instrument. In these respects she may well have consciously or unconsciously found Wu’s patronage of Buddhism, and possibly of printing as well, an example worth following. [...] Shōtoku’s use of printing was thus tied up

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<sup>631</sup> Hickman 1975: 91

<sup>632</sup> Hickman 1975: 91/92

<sup>633</sup> See Kornicki 2016: 48

with considerations relating to Buddhist ritual and political advantage in eighth-century Japan.”<sup>634</sup>

In that aspect, Peter Kornicki supports the opinion that the Hyakumantô darani was not simply an undertaking initiated simply because of its worth and meaning. Of course, as Robert Sewell points out, there is always the possibility to consider that the act was one made simply out of religious devotion.

“The replication of Buddhist scripture is considered meritorious, and certainly one million replications must have been considered especially praiseworthy. The term “hyakuman” literally means one hundred ten thousands, but in some contexts it can be less specific, meaning something like a myriad. So were there actually one million texts produced? From certain Buddhist forms of worship and documentary evidence, it appears that the number one million is correct. For instance, the ritual associated with the Sôrin darani instructs the worshiper to pledge to assemble “100,000 miniature pagodas, each containing a darani for enshrinement around a central ritual pagoda. . . . Since Buddhist cosmology postulates the existence of ten directions, each comprising a world with its own Buddha, one million darani pagodas are necessary if the Sôrin ritual is to be properly observed.” This is what Empress Shôtoku literally did by distributing one-hundred thousand of them to each of ten Buddhist temples. Thus, the production of the Hyakumantô darani can be seen as a pure act of great devotion.”<sup>635</sup>

Such an interpretation, however, could be too naïve. Considering the difficulties which Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku had to overcome prior to her first ascension to the throne, during her first reign, and then after her abdication, it was much more likely that, similar to her father, she utilized religion in order to make a political statement. On the one hand, the creation of the pagodas can be regarded as a way to strengthen the emperor’s authority, and to justify the current sovereign’s claim to the throne. On the other hand, Hyakumantô darani also fulfilled its purpose to defy the rumors about a potential love relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô.

On balance, it could be concluded that the endeavor was one of immense meaning for the future of Japan’s literary development. A printing on such a scale showed that the state and its people had the capability to pull off such a project without difficulty, and also outlined the guidelines for future enterprises. Although Peter Kornicki argues that,

“All the signs are that after Shôtoku’s death the Hyakumantô darani were seen as a political embarrassment: the treatment of the episode in the official history *Shoku nihongi*, which was revised in 794, is laconic and fails to mention the use of printing technology, and there is no mention of printing again until 1009, as noted at the beginning of this essay; the Hyakumantô darani themselves disappeared from the historical record completely until the eighteenth century.”<sup>636</sup>

it should be pointed out that Emperor Shôtoku didn’t begin the project with long-term expectations in mind. Her primary objective at the time was to find justification for her claim to the throne after the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s rebellion and the forceful abdication of Emperor Junnin which ended with the former sovereign’s exile to Awaji. She needed long-term justification in the bounds of her second reign, and she most likely didn’t expect her work to be recognized as something as huge and meaningful as her father’s Daibutsu at Tôdaiji. If Shôtoku herself wanted something comparable

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<sup>634</sup> Kornicki 2016: 48/49

<sup>635</sup> Sewell 2003: 122/123

<sup>636</sup> Kornicki 2016: 49

to Shōmu's Daibutsu, she surely would have built it, as the state had both the resources and the experience to pull off an architectural project on such a scale. The fact that the work commissioned by the last female ruler of Nara Japan wasn't reported as something important in the Shoku Nihongi's chronicles narrating her second reign shows that the emperor herself didn't see the project as something worth mentioning in an official history.

Nevertheless, the next Shoku Nihongi narrative concerning Emperor Shōtoku is actually a series of entries which begin on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765) and continue throughout the whole month<sup>637</sup>. They describe the so-called royal progress of Emperor Shōtoku in the province Kii. While Shoku Nihongi doesn't give any particular information about the purpose of the said trip, it could be assumed that the royal progression was Emperor Shōtoku's way to celebrate her victory over Fujiwara no Nakamaro and also to make a political statement as the new ruler of the state. A proof of that could be found in the fact that many high-ranking courtiers were involved in the preparations of the progress – a detail which indicates both the emperor's direct touch and the significance which the said trip held for her. During the progress, the sovereign visited the sites of ancient palaces and tombs in order to honor her predecessors. A special attention deserves the visit to the Tamatsushima Shrine recorded in the chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765).<sup>638</sup> According to a Manyōshū poem compiled by Yamabe no Akahito<sup>639</sup>, the place was also visited by Emperor Shōmu who even venerated the local deities. In deciding to make a stop at that particular site, Shōtoku not only paid her regards to her deceased father but also honored the island and its guardian deities (interestingly enough, one of them was Empress Jingū). From that point of view, the visit could be interpreted as a well-thought-out justification strategy. By stopping at a place which was initially respected by Emperor Shōmu, Shōtoku practically created the illusion of a direct continuation of her father's bloodline on the throne, thus omitting Emperor Junnin's reign. On the other hand, by paying her regards to Shintō deities despite being a Buddhist nun herself Emperor Shōtoku sought the support of the common people while emphasizing her position as a main priestess of the indigenous religion. Moreover, one of these deities was Empress Jingū, a female regent who had been respected as a ruler in her own right. From that point of view, Emperor Shōtoku's reverence for the enshrined indigenous kami could also be interpreted as her honoring one of her female predecessors on the throne. Anyway, after the emperor's stop at the Tamatsushima Shrine, the royal progress continued. According to the chronicle from the next day, a special market for the local merchants was opened in honor of the visiting sovereign.<sup>640</sup> The narrative explains that one could even buy low court ranks there. Then, the royal progress was interrupted by the news of the death of Emperor Shōtoku's political enemy, the dethroned emperor Junnin, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765).

“淡路公、不勝幽憤。踰垣而逃。守佐伯宿禰助。掾高屋連並木等、率兵邀之。公還明日、薨於院中。」詔曰。”

*[An Imperial edict reads that the Lord living in Awaji, who lost [to Emperor Shōtoku] and was sent to live indignantly in seclusion, broke through the fence and tried to escape, but was*

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<sup>637</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.10 and 10.25

<sup>638</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.10.18

<sup>639</sup> See 万葉集 [Manyōshū] Vol.6: 06/0917; Manyōshū, transl. by Keene 1965: 191

<sup>640</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.10.19

*caught by Saeki no Sukune no Tasuku and his subordinates appointed as his guards. The Duke died on the next day in his palace.]*<sup>641</sup>

An interesting peculiarity of the said narrative is its construction. Although it is mentioned that the report is a part of an Imperial edict, it does not resemble other proclamations from the time. The chronicle resembles a short notice, the purpose of which is to inform the public of the demise of someone of a relatively low social status, rather than news about the death of a former emperor. In contrast, the chronicle narrating Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion and eventual decapitation is much more detailed. However, one could understand why Shoku Nihongi's compilers decided to report on Nakamaro's life and death in detail but chose to keep the narrative of Junnin's death short. Up until his rebellion and notwithstanding the fact that he took advantage of his connections to the Imperial family, Nakamaro could have been considered a loyal servant to the throne who, through his political influence and cunning intelligence, could suppress the ambitions of the other nobles at court, thus shielding the emperor from harm. In contrast, Junnin had been a prince whose only asset was the Imperial blood coursing through his veins. During his time on the throne, he was a well-behaved puppet in the hands of several people: first Retired Emperor Kôken and her mother Kômyôshi, and then Fujiwara no Nakamaro. As a matter of fact, Nakamaro's unsuccessful rebellion only sped up Junnin's political downfall. Eventually, even the minister turned his back on him as he appointed Prince Shioyaki as the "current emperor" disregarding the fact that Junnin was theoretically still the sitting sovereign. Therefore, Junnin's fate after Nakamaro's decapitation could not be regarded as something extraordinary. Abandoned by his most powerful supporter who turned into a rebel, he could not support himself on the throne. Due to Junnin's previous attitude toward the Retired Emperor, as well as his actions during Nakamaro's revolt (he was considered an accomplice of the minister), Kôken announced his dethronement and exile to the province Awaji in an edict following the suppression of the rebellion.<sup>642</sup> From the chronicle above, it is understood that the dethroned emperor died there only a year thereafter, after being caught in an attempt to escape from his residence. His actions could be interpreted as indignified, as he could not accept his fate with the conduct becoming of a member of the Imperial House. After having sided with and being used by Fujiwara no Nakamaro for so long, the attitude of the dethroned emperor showed that he was not willing to take responsibility for his earlier decisions. Instead, he tried to escape from them after having lost the political fight with the Retired Emperor. The authors of the chronicle most likely chose to emphasize the fact that Junnin "lost [to Emperor Shôtoku]", in an attempt to show his lack of dignity in the face of defeat. At any rate, Junnin's death did not disturb the Imperial progress. The whole entourage continued to travel and soon reached the home province of the Buddhist monk Dôkyô. The climax of the whole trip was the ceremony in the Yuge clan's temple where Chinese and Korean music was performed.<sup>643</sup> Several days after that, Shôtoku proclaimed an Imperial edict with which she appointed Dôkyô to the position of First Minister of the State and Meditation Monk.<sup>644</sup>

The next Shoku Nihongi entries concerning Emperor Shôtoku narrate her visits to the residences of high officials. Several accounts of that matter could be found scattered throughout the chronicles of her second reign.

“幸左大臣第、授従一位。”

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<sup>641</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.10.22

<sup>642</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.10.9

<sup>643</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.10.30

<sup>644</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.10.2

*[The Emperor] visited the residence of the Minister of the Left and bestowed upon him the Junior First rank.]*<sup>645</sup>

“幸右大臣第。授正二位。”

*[The Emperor] visited the residence of the Minister of Right and bestowed upon him the Senior Second rank.]*<sup>646</sup>

Compared to her father who always changed his residences, or even to her first reign as Emperor Kōken when the most noteworthy mention of an Imperial visit is that to the residence of Fujiwara no Nakamaro at the time of Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy, Emperor Shōtoku was a ruler who preferred to stay at the Imperial Palace in the capital. According to those two chronicles, however, there were also cases in which she went out of her way to visit her ministers and to personally grant them their new court ranks. Considering the year in which the two narratives were compiled, the reason for the personal visits of the emperor could be easily understood. The events took place in 769, the year in which the so-called Dōkyō Incident occurred. As it would be seen in Shōtoku's Imperial edicts, the later years of her reign were politically unstable even before the said incident took place. The Fujiwara tried to win back their positions at court and in the administration. As it would be later discussed, there existed even the possibility that the Dōkyō Incident had been the end result of Fujiwara's machinations. Therefore, it should be no wonder that the emperor needed support in such fragile political situation which threatened to undermine her authority. Therefore, by personally visiting the Minister of the Left Fujiwara no Nagate and the Minister of the Right Kibi no Makibi and bestowing upon them new court ranks, Emperor Shōtoku clearly wanted to ensure their loyalty. Moreover, the former was her cousin and the latter was her respected teacher. If the courtiers and the common people saw that unflattering ministers as those two supported the sovereign, they would not have dared to oppose the emperor in that time of crisis. Thus, it could be assumed that Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku used the Imperial visits during her second reign as a tool to strengthen her position in politically difficult times.

The next chronicle could be considered the culmination of the political difficulties which the last female ruler of Nara Japan encountered during her two reigns. It is dated to the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) and narrates the infamous Dōkyō Incident in which the Buddhist monk supposedly tried to usurp the Imperial throne.

“始大宰主神習宜阿曾麻呂、希旨。方媚事道鏡。因矯八幡神教言。令道鏡即皇位。天下太平。道鏡聞之。深喜自負。天皇召清麻呂於床下。勅曰。昨夜夢。八幡神使來云。大神為令奏事。請尼法均。宜汝清麻呂相代而往聽彼神命。臨發。道鏡語清麻呂曰。大神所以請使者。蓋為告我即位之事。因重募以官爵。清麻呂行詣神宮。大神訖宣曰。我國家開闢以來。君臣定矣。以臣為君。未之有也。天之日嗣必立皇緒。無道之人。宜早掃除。清麻呂來歸。奏如神教。於是、道鏡大怒。解清麻呂本官。出為因幡員外介。未之任所。尋有詔。除名配於大隅。其姊法均還俗配於備後。”<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.2.3

<sup>646</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.2.24

<sup>647</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.9.25



*[Dazai Kanzukasa Suge no Asomaro yearned for success and he flattered Dôkyô. Accordingly, he fabricated a pronouncement of Hachiman, which said: "Let Dôkyô be made emperor and there shall be a great peace in the realm."*

*Hearing this, Dôkyô was greatly overjoyed and boasted of it. The empress summoned Kiyomaro to her and said: "Last night in a dream a messenger of the Great God Hachiman came to me and said: "Summon the nun Hôkin for the purpose of determining the god's pronouncement on this matter. Send Kiyomaro in her place to hear the divine command."*

*As he was about to set out, Dôkyô enticed Kiyomaro with the following words: "The god has no doubt requested a messenger in order to announce my election to the throne. If this is accomplished, I will bestow government rank and office on you."*

*Kiyomaro departed and proceeded to the shrine, where the god gave an oracle which said: "Since the establishment of our state the distinction between lord and subject has been fixed. Never has there been an occasion when a subject was made lord. The throne of heavenly sun succession shall be given to one of the imperial lineage; wicked persons should immediately be swept away."*

*Kiyomaro returned and reported to the empress as the god had instructed. Dôkyô then became exceedingly angry. He dismissed Kiyomaro from his original post and appointed him Ingai Suke of Inaba province. He had not yet proceeded to his post when an edict was issued depriving him of rank and exiling him to Ôsumi. His elder sister Hôkin was defrocked and sent to exile in Higo.]<sup>648</sup>*

Even though the last emperor of Nara Japan had a tendency to rely on oracles and omens during her second reign (that peculiarity of hers would be discussed in the next chapters), the record shows that she did not blindly trust the words of the deity Hachiman. On the contrary, she was suspicious and wanted to verify the contents of the oracle. For that purpose, she ordered the nun Hôkin and her brother Wake no Kiyomaro to go to Usa and to hear the deity's wish. From that point of view, Emperor Shôtoku is described as a sovereign who, despite her reliance on oracles and omens, did not blindly trust any information which supposedly was reported to her as a deity's wish. She was not ready to step down in favor of a man not bound to the Imperial House by blood simply because the god from Usa said so. At the same time, the chronicle also indicates that the whole incident was actually orchestrated by Dôkyô, who was hungry for power to the point that he wanted to ascend the Imperial throne. In contrast to the chronicle from 764 which narrates the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and also mentions the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô, the current entry clearly shows a negative opinion toward the Buddhist monk. Thus, it could be assumed that, regardless of whether Dôkyô had orchestrated the Hachiman oracle in order to usurp the throne, he was purposefully described as a "wicked" person by the authors of Shoku Nihongi. At the same time, Emperor Shôtoku is portrayed as a wise ruler who did not even trust the words of the deities on matters concerning the throne and the succession.

The last chronicle directly concerning the last female ruler of Nara Japan is that which narrates her death on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 1 (770).

「葬高野天皇於大和国添下郡佐貴郷高野山陵。[···] 皇太子在宮留守。道鏡法師奉梓宮。便留廬於陵下。」天皇、自幸由義宮。便覺聖躬不予。於是。即還平城。自此積百余日。不

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<sup>648</sup> Bender (e) 1980: 42/43

親視事。群臣曾無得謁見者。典藏從三位吉備朝臣由利。出入臥內。伝可奏事。天皇尤崇  
仏道。務恤刑獄。勝宝之際。政称儉約。自太師被誅。道鏡擅權。輕興力役。務繕伽藍。  
公私彫喪。国用不足。政刑日峻、殺戮妄加。故後之言事者。頗称其冤焉。”

*[Emperor Takano was buried in the Kôya-san no Misasagi [Takano no misasagi] in the Saki Village of the District Soejimo in the Province Yamato. [...] The Crown Prince stayed at the nearby shrine [to pay his regards]. The Buddhist priest Dôkyô offered catalpa [branches] at the shrine and stayed to serve at the Imperial tomb.*

*The Emperor herself visited Yuge no miya to cheer up the displeased priest. She returned to the Heijô Palace after more than 100 days. In the meantime, she could not personally take care of state matters nor was she able to give audience. For that reason, Kuranosuke Third Rank Minister Kibi visited the Emperor and reported to her on state matters. The Emperor respected the Buddhist teachings. She fulfilled her duties with mercy and compassion and she did not spend lavishly during her reign. She exposed [the machinations of] Taishi [Fujiwara no Nakamaro]. Dôkyô abused the power [given to him by the Emperor]. Labor hand was utilized for the repair of temples. Government and people suffered and the state resources were not fully utilized. The punishments were harsh and the unnecessary killings increased. For that reason, the future generations spoke of the Emperor with hatred and portrayed her with prejudice.]<sup>649</sup>*

The narrative gives brief retrospection of Emperor Shôtoku's reign and describes her as a merciful and compassionate ruler who did not abuse her authority. Moreover, the chronicle emphasizes the fact that the emperor herself (自; mizukara) exposed the plot of Fujiwara no Nakamaro, thus indicating her inner strength and sharp intelligence. While the first part of the chronicle describes a ruler with both good heart and high intellect, the second part reports the emperor's biggest political failure: her decision to support Dôkyô. The structure of that segment creates the impression that Emperor Shôtoku's blunders in the government (harsh punishments, killings, unwise economic policy) were all Dôkyô's fault – the result of him abusing the power given to him by the sovereign and skillfully hiding his actions – and continues the line from the previous chronicle of the Dôkyô Incident. The general impression is only strengthened by the last sentence of the entry in which it is explicitly pointed out that “the future generations spoke of the Emperor with hatred and portrayed her with prejudice”. The word “prejudice” indicates that the emperor's actions and decisions were not assessed fairly by the others, that the people disregarded the truth and simply saw what they wanted to see. As a result, Emperor Shôtoku was not treated with the respect which she was due by the future generations. With that last sentence, Shoku Nihongi's authors (in)directly give their opinion on the matter of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal. According to them, the last female emperor of Nara Japan had been a good and compassionate ruler who had been unjustly despised and neglected due to the failures of other people who were meant to be loyal toward the throne but abused their power instead. A special emphasis is put on the fact that it was only the future generations which treated Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku with disdain and prejudice, thus indicating that she was respected by her contemporaries.

In effect, it could be assumed that initially Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was not judged based on preconceptions due to her gender nor was her reputation slandered with false accusations. As it was already pointed out, Shoku Nihongi, similar to any other chronicle or historical text written by people, can not be completely unbiased on certain matters due to outer and inner factors such as the personal

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<sup>649</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.8.17

views of the authors, or the political situation in the state at the time of the chronicle's compilation. Moreover, considering the events which took place during the two reigns of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku which reached their peak with the fiasco of the infamous Dôkyô Incident, one could assume that the last female ruler of Nara Japan would have been described in a bad light. Instead, one finds a neutral-to-positive Shoku Nihongi narrative, a tendency only briefly interrupted by the second part of the chronicle of Shôtoku's death. Even in that case, however, it should be noted that the structure of the record creates the impression of *"the good ruler betrayed by the bad monk Dôkyô who abused the power entrusted to him by the sovereign"*. Thus, Shoku Nihongi portrays Emperor Shôtoku as a good and compassionate ruler whose failures could have been attributed to the disloyalty of her subjects. Considering the fact that Emperor Junnin is mostly described as a weak person and a ruler without dignity, it could not be said that Shoku Nihongi's authors saw the members of the Imperial House only in a good light and portrayed them accordingly. From that point of view, it could be assumed that the narratives were kept maximally objective, and that they showed the personal opinions of the authors only briefly, as is the case with the last words of the record of Emperor Shôtoku's death. While the last sentence clearly indicates the authors' disdain for the later portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, it also suggests that the image of Kôken/Shôtoku had been altered only in the later periods of Japanese history – a fact which would be discussed in the next chapters.

The Imperial edicts of Kôken/Shôtoku: the emperor's self-portrayal

After having seen the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku according to the original Shoku Nihongi chronicles, it would also be useful to see how the emperor herself created her image for the future generations. As it was already explained, the proclamations in Shoku Nihongi can be divided into three types: senmyô, choku and shô, which could be told apart mainly by the language in which they were compiled. As the senmyô were compiled in Old Japanese, it was believed that they were written down at the moment when the ruler expressed his wishes, a hypothesis which earned the senmyô the reputation as the only real proof of a sovereign's life. In contrast, the choku and shô were compiled in Chinese, which inevitably gave them a more official character. Nevertheless, all three types of Imperial edicts which can be found between Shoku Nihongi's pages are traces left behind by the emperor who proclaimed them and could be regarded as his self-portrayal. From that point of view, after having seen the description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku made by the compilers of Shoku Nihongi, it would be interesting to see how the last female ruler of Nara Japan herself created her public image through her edicts.

The first Imperial edict left behind in relation to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku is unique in its composition, as it combines the proclamation of Emperor Shômu's abdication and of his daughter's ascension to the throne.

“【S 1 4】現神(止)御宇倭根子天皇可御命(良麻止)宣御命(乎)、衆聞食宣。高天原神積坐皇親神魯棄・神魯美命以、吾孫(乃)命(乃)將知食国天下(止)言依奉(乃)隨、遠皇祖御世始而天皇御世御世聞看来食国天(ツ)日嗣高御座(乃)業(止奈母)隨神所念行(佐久止)勅天皇(我)御命(乎)、衆聞食勅。平城(乃)宮(爾)御宇(之)天皇(乃)詔(之久)。挂畏近江大津(乃)宮(爾)御宇(之)天皇(乃)不改(自伎)常典(等)初賜(比)定賜(部流)法隨、斯天(ツ)日嗣高御座(乃)業者、御命(爾)坐(世)、伊夜嗣(爾)奈(賀)御命聞看(止)勅(夫)御命(乎)畏自物受賜(理)坐(天)、食国天下(乎)惠賜(比)治賜(布)間(爾)、万機密(久)多(久志天)御身不敢賜有(礼)、隨法天(ツ)日嗣高御座(乃)業者、朕子王(爾)授賜(止)勅天皇御命(乎)、親王等・王等・臣等・百官人等、天下(

乃)公民、衆聞食宣。又天皇御命(良未止)勅命(乎)、衆聞食宣。挂畏我皇天皇、斯天(ツ)日嗣高御座(乃)業(乎)受賜(弓)仕奉(止)負賜(閉)頂(爾)受賜(理)恐(未里)進(毛)不知、退(毛)不知(爾)、恐(美)坐(久止)宣天皇御命(乎)、衆聞食勅。故是以、御命坐、勅(久)、朕者、拙劣雖在、親王等(乎)始而王等・臣等、諸天皇朝庭立賜(部留)食国(乃)政(乎)戴持而、明淨心以誤落言無助仕奉(爾)依(弓之)。天下者平(久)安(久)、治賜(比)惠賜(布閉支)物(爾)有(止奈毛)、神隨所念坐(久止)勅天皇御命(乎)、衆聞食宣。」<sup>650</sup>

*[Let all hear the words which are the command proclaimed by the Emperor, Beloved Child of Yamato, who rules all under heaven as a manifest god. Let all hear the command of the Emperor, which he decrees and pronounces as a god carrying out the duties of the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession, ruling the country in the divine lineage, age after age of emperors, beginning with the reign of the distant divine ancestor, according to the decree that “Our Grandchildren shall have the rule of all under heaven,” given by the Divine Male Ancestor and the Divine Female Ancestor, seated as gods in the High Plain of Heaven.*

*Hearken to the words spoken by the Empress Genshō who ruled the realm from the capital at Nara, “In pursuance of the law first set forth by the Emperor Tenji who ruled from the capital of Ōtsu in Ōmi, whose name is invoked with awe and fear, according to the law of imperial succession which shall not be altered, it is Our command that you Shōmu shall succeed and perform the duties of the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession.” Thus We have with great fearfulness received these duties, and overseen the realm of all under heaven with compassion. While we have done this, the number of myriad daily duties have mounted and our body has become unable to sustain this burden. So now let all the imperial princes, the princes, the ministers, the hundred officials and all the people of the realm hearken to the Emperor's great command that we have appointed Our child the Princess to the High Throne of the Heavenly Sun Succession, according to the law.*

*(The Empress Kōken's edict):*

*Let all hearken to the great command which the Empress proclaims. Let all hear the proclamation of the Empress, that she has received this position with awe and fear and not without hesitation, and will carry out the duties of the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession to which the revered Emperor Shōmu, whose name is greatly to be feared, has appointed her.*

*We thus command, though We may be unskillful and foolish, that beginning with the imperial princes, all princes and ministers receive the task of ruling this country which the Imperial Court has established, and reverently serve with bright and clear hearts, and without committing errors or mistakes aid in ruling the land in peace and harmony. We reflect as a god, that thus shall We be able to rule with compassion. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>651</sup>*

The relatively long senmyō is an interesting example of, as Ross Bender describes it, “the most flowery type of Old Japanese edict”<sup>652</sup>. The opening sequence contains many references to the traditional

<sup>650</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平勝宝 [Tenpyō shōhō] 1.7.2

<sup>651</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 26/27

<sup>652</sup> Bender 2021: 74

Japanese deities and beliefs, and could thus be described as Shintôist. In contrast to other edicts (for example, Junnin's enthronement edict<sup>653</sup>) which employed phrases from Chinese chronicles such as Yijing (The Book of Changes) or Buddhist and classical Chinese tropes, the wording of the first paragraph of Shômu's abdication edict/Kôken's ascension edict refers to the divinity of the emperors, a doctrine which, as the future showed, was to play a very important role for the country and its people. As Ross Bender points out,

“Not all of the senmyô employ such powerfully Shinto wording; less than a third of the prefaces to the sixty-two Old Japanese edicts in Shoku Nihongi utilize this language.”<sup>654</sup>

By utilizing and officially expressing the belief about the emperor's lineage, Shômu most likely sought recognition of his decision to appoint his daughter as his successor. If one compares all Imperial edicts in Shoku Nihongi<sup>655</sup>, it turns out that only Emperor Shômu's abdication edict contains the phrase “*according to the decree that “Our Grandchildren shall have the rule of all under heaven,” given by the Divine Male Ancestor and the Divine Female Ancestor*”. By emphasizing the point that the Imperial ancestors were both male and female, Shômu directly drew parallels between the said forebears and their grandchildren, the emperors. Since it was a “fact” that the deities were male and female, then there should have been nothing wrong with having male or female ruler on the throne. Thus, in his last edict, Shômu once more emphasized his strong wish that his daughter would succeed him. Surprisingly enough, the second paragraph of the proclamation speaks of the continuation of the Imperial line as per the laws set by Emperor Tenji. Even though Emperor Shômu was a descendant of the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line in the Imperial House, he didn't want to point that fact out but emphasized the importance of the continuation of the Imperial bloodline instead. In the third paragraph, the emperor explained the reason for his abdication and his wish to see his daughter succeeding him, thus bringing his edict to an end.

Interestingly enough, the senmyô doesn't come to an end after Emperor Shômu's words, but continues with the words of the new emperor Kôken instead. Namely that structure makes the said proclamation unique. If one compares the abdication edict of Kôken to the ascension edict of her successor Junnin (r. 758 – 764)<sup>656</sup>, or those of Emperor Shôtoku and her successor Kônin (r. 770 – 781)<sup>657</sup>, it becomes clear that there had been no established practice for the first edict of the new emperor to be a part of the last edict of the previous sovereign. In the first example, the two edicts had been issued on the same day but still had been written down as two different Imperial decrees. In the second example, there is a time span of two months between the last edict of Emperor Shôtoku and the first decree of Emperor Kônin. From that point of view, it could only be speculated why the last edict of Shômu and the first decree of Kôken were reported as one proclamation. A possible reason could have been Emperor Shômu's wish to accentuate his intention to appoint his daughter as a successor to the throne “*according to the law*”. Another possibility could have been the new ruler's insecurity in the face of the immense responsibility and her wish to use her father's authority in her favor. Then again, one can not exclude the prospect of, notwithstanding the words written down in his last edict, Shômu seeing his daughter not as an ordinary successor but only as a temporary solution to the succession issue, and not giving her the independence to proclaim her own ascension. Here, one could be reminded of the

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<sup>653</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 38

<sup>654</sup> Bender 2021: 75

<sup>655</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi]; Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018

<sup>656</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 2.8 【S 2 3】 and 【S 2 4】

<sup>657</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.8.4 【S 4 7】 and 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.10 【S 4 8】

Imperial edict from the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) in which the following words of Emperor Shōmu are reported,

“As for the imperial throne, if it is conferred on someone whom Heaven has not ordained, that person will not be able to keep it. Rather it will cause that person to perish. Even though you may say ‘This is the person whom We have established’, yet if you come to know in your heart and see with your eye that that person is not competent, then follow your heart and replace that person.”<sup>658</sup>

By comparing Shōmu’s abdication edict to his words reported in Emperor Shōtoku’s edict from 769, a certain controversy could be found. In his last edict, the emperor speaks of the “*law set forth by the Emperor Tenji [...] which shall not be altered*”, thus indicating that the said law was still created by a human, albeit with godly descent. At the same time, in the edict from 769, one reads that “*if [the Imperial throne] is conferred on someone whom Heaven has not ordained, that person will not be able to keep it.*” This inconsistency in the contents of his words could be understood in only one way: Shōmu regarded his daughter as an emperor chosen only by human law but not as one approved by the Heavens. Considering the backlash against Shōmu’s decision to appoint his daughter to the position of Crown Prince, it should be no wonder that the sovereign tried to find the balance between continuing his own bloodline on the throne and satisfying the nobles’ wishes. From that point of view, it could be assumed that by combining his abdication edict with the ascension edict of his daughter and successor, Shōmu wanted to create the impression that he also didn’t expect from Crown Princess Abe to be something more than a temporary solution to the succession issue, but she still ought to be respected as a ruler by the Imperial subjects. A proof of Shōmu’s own understanding of the matter could be found in his decision to appoint a male Crown Prince for her before his death. According to an entry from the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 1 (757), in his last will, he appointed Prince Funado as an heir apparent to Emperor Kōken.<sup>659</sup> The prince was son of Prince Niitabe and a descendant of Emperor Tenmu, which meant that a potential ascension of his would not have disrupted the continuation of the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line within the Imperial House.

While that appointment could have been made by Shōmu in an attempt to secure the order of succession within the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line, it clearly was not made with the consent of the sitting Emperor Kōken. Some evidence of that could be found in the chronicle which reported Funado’s appointment. There, Emperor Kōken’s wish to have the Crown Prince deposed could be seen.

“皇太子道祖王。身居諒闇。志在淫縱。雖加教勅。曾無改悔。於是。勅召群臣。以示先帝遺詔。因問廢不之事。右大臣已下同奏云。不敢乖違顧命之旨。是日。廢皇太子、以王歸第。”

*[The Crown Prince didn’t obey the Imperial edict and indulged himself in inappropriate and lewd actions on the outskirts of the capital during the national mourning [period] without any repentance or regret. The [wish for the] Crown Prince’s appointment was expressed by the late Emperor in his last will and it had been accordingly fulfilled. However, such demeanor is a problem which calls for the Crown Prince’s rightful punishment and his deposition. The Minister of the Right already expressed his agreement on the matter. Hear all and don’t you dare to*

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<sup>658</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 70

<sup>659</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 1.3.29

*disobey the Imperial words: From this day onward, the Crown Prince would be set aside and he would be demoted to his previous rank of Prince [ô].*<sup>660</sup>

While that chronicle is not marked in Shoku Nihongi as a part of an Imperial edict, it clearly shows the characteristics of one. In any case, the character “命” (mikoto) which could be translated as “command” or “decree” but also as “the spoken words of the emperor” indicates that the narrative could be considered an Imperial edict. Anyway, with the deposition of the Crown Prince chosen by her father the emperor showed her wish to rule as an independent ruler unmoved by the will of other people, being they even her parents. If she saw herself simply as a temporary solution to the succession issue, Kôken would have been content to “hold the throne” until the time came for her to be replaced with the Crown Prince chosen by her father. Apparently that had not been the case. Although the emperor pointed out the disrespectful actions of the Crown Prince during the period of national mourning for Retired Emperor Shômu as the reason for his deposition, thus emphasizing her own filial piety toward her deceased father, it is questionable whether that was the only motive for her actions. In an edict dated to the next month, it could be seen that Kôken was unsure of the reactions which Funado’s deposition would trigger. Therefore, she tried to find justification for her actions.

“先帝遺詔、立道祖王。昇為皇太子。而王諒闇未終。陵草未乾。私通侍童。無恭先帝。居喪之禮。曾不合憂。[···] 躬自乞三宝。禱神明。政之善惡。願示徵驗。於是。三月廿日戊辰。朕之住屋承塵帳裏。現天下太平之字。灼然昭著。斯乃上天所祐。神明所標。”<sup>661</sup>

*[In accordance with the previous sovereign’s final testament, Prince Funado was elevated to the office of crown prince. But during the mourning period, when rites were not yet finished and grass did not yet cover the royal tomb, the prince [Funado] secretly carried on with a servant and failed to show proper respect for the deceased sovereign. His demeanor during mourning demonstrated no signs of grief. [...] I prayed to the Three Jewels and to the gods to judge the merits and demerits of my rule and to provide a sign. On the twentieth day of last month the characters “Peace in the realm” were clearly seen on a palace curtain. So do the gods make manifest high Heaven’s aid for my rule.]*<sup>662</sup>

According to the edict, the emperor herself reported the appearance of an omen and accepted it as a sign that the Heavens supported her decision to depose the unfilial and disrespectful Crown Prince. The utilization of Heavenly signs, omens and oracles as a justification for one’s decisions was a tactic previously used by Kôken’s father. He also sought Hachiman’s support for the construction of the Daibutsu at Tôdaiji. Anyway, the edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) set the beginning of an apparatus fed by omens and oracles that was utilized by Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku during her two periods on the throne as a justification tool for her decisions. In that aspect, she strictly followed the Chinese tendency to purposefully search for and find Heavenly signs even in the smallest events or appearances.

According to Ross Bender, upon closer examination of Shoku Nihongi, it becomes clear that the omen-reporting and -interpreting techniques had not been something unfamiliar in the Nara-period Japan. According to a narrative from the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757), a whole curriculum

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<sup>660</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.3.29

<sup>661</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.4.4

<sup>662</sup> Ko, Haboush-Kim, Piggott 2003: 56

based on Chinese texts was laid out for the students. There were seven disciplines to be studied: Classics, History, Medicine, Acupuncture, Astronomy, yin-yang (onmyō 陰陽), and Calendar. The texts which were to be used as references included classics such as the Shijing (詩經; Classic of Poetry), Yijing (易經; Book of Changes) and Shujing (書經; Classic of History), and the three histories (Shiji 史記, Hanshu 漢書, and Hou Hanshu 後漢書). Additionally, more esoteric texts like the Maijing (Classic of the pulse, 脈經), the Zhenjing (Classic of acupuncture, 針經), Tianwenshu (Book of astronomy, 天文書), Wuxing dayi (General principles of the five phases, 五行大義), and Dayan liyi (Calendar of Dayan, 大衍曆議) were also adopted.<sup>663</sup> All those texts apparently encouraged the interpretation of certain occurrences as signs of the will of the gods. During the late Nara period, even negative occurrences such as droughts, earthquakes or floods were not seen for what they really were but simply as the gods' way to deliver their wishes to the people. Of course, the range of the omens found by the Japanese astrologers was strongly influenced by the Chinese texts which the latter had studied in their youth. Ross Bender draws parallels between the omens found in some Chinese scriptures and those reported in the Japanese histories. An analysis of the contents of the omens found in the Hanshu (漢書, Chronicle on the Han Dynasty) shows that the "gods' signs" in China were purposely sought mainly in relation to the legitimization of a ruler. Such was, for example, the case with Emperor Wang Mang, the founder of and the only ruler from the Xin Dynasty. The auspicious omens related to the justification of his usurpation of the Imperial throne were "*the discovery of inscribed stones and a stone ox, the appearance of Heaven's envoy in a dream, the spontaneous opening up of a well, the finding of a bronze casket with two inscribed envelope covers, and the like*".<sup>664</sup> As Bender points out, similar was also the case with the founder of the Sui dynasty Emperor Wen. He was heralded by fortunate omens which included verses from popular songs and quotations from prognostic and divinatory texts.<sup>665</sup> Of course, there were some Chinese emperors who adopted a more rational approach. Such a ruler had been the second Tang emperor Taizong who refused to be guided by omens in his political decisions<sup>666</sup>. Eventually, the omens' peak of popularity was reached during the reign of the one and only female emperor of China Wu Zetian. In an attempt to justify her ascension to the throne, she elevated the interpretation of omens on a completely different level. According to Richard Guisso,

"A white stone was discovered in the Lo River in 688 inscribed with the prophecy: "A Sage Mother shall come to Rule Mankind; and her Imperium shall bring Eternal Prosperity." Thereupon she led her court to the Altar of Heaven, declared the Lo River sacred, and changed the reign title to "Eternal Prosperity"."<sup>667</sup>

In general, the range of the auspicious omens varied depending on the occurrence which they were bound to predict. Thus, Anne Birrell, translator of The Classic of Mountains and Seas (山海經, Shanhai jing) notes that,

"Animals form the majority of accounts of omens (21 portents), then birds (11), fish (5), snakes (5), and fabulous birds (4). The unexpected appearance of these creatures, mostly rare, some fabulous, serves as a warning of imminent disaster. For example, the simian creature named

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<sup>663</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 1.11.9

<sup>664</sup> Bielenstein 1986: 230

<sup>665</sup> See Bender (a) 2013: 49

<sup>666</sup> See Bender (a) 2013: 49

<sup>667</sup> Guisso 1979: 302



the crimson-sate is an omen Other ominous creatures predict the catastrophes of major flood (8 instances), drought (13), war (8), conscription (1), locusts (1), panic (1), besides the less frequently mentioned good omens of peace (1) and bumper harvests (3).<sup>668</sup>

Continuing with the history of the Han dynasty, other omens are introduced:

“...a huge rock appearing in front of the palace to which thousands of white crows gathered; a willow tree rising up suddenly in the imperial garden, with worms gnawing at its leaves to form an inscription; gatherings of phoenixes; and flourishing of fluorescent grains with nine ears. Miraculous animals (yellow dragons, white tigers and horses, unicorns) and plants appear. The Songshu emphasizes the physiognomy of the infant emperors and portents at their birth, and much attention is given to the stars, solar eclipses, and other cosmic happenings.”<sup>669</sup>

Ross Bender points out that the number and frequency of auspicious omens found in the Japanese histories didn't deviate much from their Chinese counterparts. The only difference was that the Japanese portents “almost all belong[ed] to the tamer strands of this tradition.”<sup>670</sup> In standard histories, the “pantheon” of auspicious animals comprised white tortoises, birds, or horses with unusual markings. Nevertheless, that relatively ordinary set of animals steps back in chronicles such as Shoku Nihongi where one can see the appearance of hybrid animals or even dragons.

According to Bender, many Japanese scholars have already dedicated their research to the examination of the auspicious omens which appear in historical texts and chronicles such as Nihonshoki or Shoku Nihongi.<sup>671</sup> Speaking of the portents during the two reigns of the last female emperor of Nara Japan, Taira Hidemichi finds only six reported cases of auspicious omens from the reign of Emperor Kōken, but the comparatively huge number of twenty-one omens from the reign of Emperor Shōtoku. At the same time, no omens from the reign of Emperor Junnin are reported.<sup>672</sup> On that matter, Murayama Shūichi comments that the frequency of omens had always been related to the reign of one or another sovereign, as it either emphasized his importance as a ruler or diminished his Imperial authority.<sup>673</sup> Apparently such beliefs were even encouraged by the law: the regulations of the Ritsuryō codes stated that:

“Omens [shōzui] appear in response to the actions of the ruler.”<sup>674</sup>

It seems that the rulers of Nara Japan knew how to utilize the appearance of auspicious omens and their interpretation in order to present themselves in a certain light. The result of their strategy is described by Murayama who reports on

“[...] a graph with a huge spike for catastrophes in the reign of Junnin, and the highest peak for lucky omens during the reign of Shōtoku Tennō. [...] the four peaks of recorded natural disasters occur in the reigns of Kōgyoku 皇極, Tenmu, Genmei 元明, and Junnin, corresponding to events such as the Taika reforms, Tenmu's consolidation of power as Tennō, the transfer of the capital to Nara, and the struggle between Fujiwara Nakamaro and Retired Empress Kōken

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<sup>668</sup> Shan Hai Jing, Classic of Mountains and Seas, transl. by Birell 1999: xxxv

<sup>669</sup> Bender (a) 2013: 53

<sup>670</sup> Bender (a) 2013: 53

<sup>671</sup> See Bender (a) 2013: 49

<sup>672</sup> See Taira 1964: 75/80

<sup>673</sup> See Murayama 1981: 50/53

<sup>674</sup> Ritsuryō: Giseiryō, transl. in Bender (a) 2013: 61

during the Junnin era. With the reigns of Kōnin 光仁天皇 and Kanmu the numbers of catastrophes gradually fall, indicating a growing stabilization in the system of Onmyōdō.”<sup>675</sup>

Interestingly enough, however, the abovementioned omens were not strictly classified as “good” or “bad”. Instead, they were simply accepted for what they were. The sighting of a good omen was always something to be overjoyed with. In contrast, the bad portent was not explicitly commented upon with the intention to find a deeper meaning behind it. In many cases, bad occurrences were accepted as such, and an attempt was made to change their course in a positive way.

“The catastrophic natural events are recorded in the chronicle almost entirely without comment, and the reactions by the government are eminently rational. Most commonly such events as famine are listed tersely, with the name of a province or provinces, and the notice that “relief supplies were granted.” The court’s reaction to a series of lengthy incidents of drought and famine from 763 to 765 was to institute measures to change the coinage system, create storehouses and methods to transfer grain to affected areas, and to remit taxes. Most striking was the institution of a system of selling government rank, usually for a fixed price for a degree of promotion in rank.”<sup>676</sup>

An example of that could be found during the reign of Kōken/Shōtoku’s father Emperor Shōmu. As it was mentioned previously, during his time on the throne drought and famine occurred throughout the country on a regular basis. His initial answer to the series of catastrophes seemed to have been continued efforts to fight them by utilizing the state resources, a reaction which didn’t deviate much from the “standard” behavior of a ruler during the occurrence of bad “portents”. From a certain point in time on, however, the emperor’s response to the crisis changed. The combination of famine, droughts and devastating series of earthquakes and plagues seems to have influenced Shōmu’s opinion on the nature of the omens and the meaning behind their occurrence. While there are no specific chronicles which express the sovereign’s thoughts on the matter, there are certain indications that Shōmu believed that the natural disasters and catastrophes had been a punishment exacted on him by the Heavens. His abrupt turn to Buddhism and his blind belief in Hachiman’s oracles, the incorporation of which could be considered the Daibutsu at Tōdaiji, seem to have been Emperor Shōmu’s way to seek the mercy of the Heavens. Thus, the beginning of a tendency was set in which the occurrence of a catastrophic event was regarded as a sign of the god’s displeasure with the ruler of the state.

Shōmu’s daughter, Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku, seemed to have elevated that tendency to new heights. During her two reigns, every omen was strictly classified as “good”, “bad” or even both depending on the context and the situation which was to be solved thereby. As in the case with the edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 1 (757), the appearance of the characters 天下太平 (tenka taihei; “Peace in the realm”) seems to have been interpreted both as a positive sign for the deposition of Crown Prince Funado, and as an indication of Heavens’ support of the sovereign’s decision on the matter. In addition, the edict from Tenpyō hōji 1 (757) introduced another tendency typical of the two reigns of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. According to Dorothy Ko, in the said decree, the sovereign emphasized her filial piety toward Emperor Shōmu.<sup>677</sup> It could be speculated that Kōken’s demonstration of respect for her father and the “*prerogatives that ensued therefrom*”<sup>678</sup> could be interpreted as her way to demand the same reverence from her subjects and from her Crown Prince, albeit not the one chosen by her. As Prince

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<sup>675</sup> Murayama 1981: 50/53

<sup>676</sup> Bender (a) 2013: 55

<sup>677</sup> See Ko, Haboush-Kim, Piggott: 56

<sup>678</sup> Ko, Haboush-Kim, Piggott: 56

Funado failed to show his obedience toward her and his consideration, that is filial piety, toward her father, Kôken didn't deem him suitable for the position of Crown Prince anymore and therefore sought his deposition. It was a known fact that the emperor was brought up in accordance with the Confucian norms and the Buddhist religion: her political teacher had been Kibi no Makibi, while her father Emperor Shômu had been a devout Buddhist. It was therefore expected from Kôken to act with utmost reverence for her parents in accordance with her education, and she seemed to have done so. She could have deposed the Crown Prince either after her father's abdication or immediately after his death, but she never did it. Instead, she preferred to wait another year before making the first step toward her political independence, which could be regarded as an indication of her education and her own understanding of politics. Similar to her father, Kôken didn't want to be seen as a vengeful and bloodthirsty ruler. Therefore, she used a strategy similar to that of Emperor Shômu who interpreted the Heavens' signs as a blessing for his actions. According to Dorothy Ko, summarily, the edict of Emperor Kôken from 757 signals three important facts:

“When her denigrators complained about her sex and inability to produce an heir, she responded by emphasizing her filial relationship with her father and the prerogatives that ensued therefrom, including her right to expect subordination from similarly filial ministers and subjects in the realm. At the same time, Kôken signaled the importance of the Three Jewels of Buddhism in addition to Japan's own geological deities as intermediaries with Heaven. Her father, self-proclaimed “servant of the Buddha” who constructed Tôdaiji's Great Buddha while also honoring deities across the realm, had propitiated both. His filial daughter did so as well, and in return propitious signs signaled Heaven's mandate. Kôken's edict of 757 reflects a new synthesis of the Sun-line myth, strong belief in Buddhist realm protection, and emphasis on the Chinese classical discourse.”<sup>679</sup>

Anyway, after her decision to depose Crown Prince Funado, the emperor was free to decide who would succeed her on the throne. Of course, the succession issue gave cause for concern to both courtiers and sovereign. The emperor's kin Fujiwara were in their element. Thus, Fujiwara no Toyonari (son of Fujiwara no Muchimaro) and Fujiwara no Nagate (son of Fujiwara no Fusasaki) recommended Prince Funado's older brother Prince Shioyaki. The Prince was son of Prince Niitabe and thus descendant of Emperor Tenmu. Moreover, he was married to Emperor Kôken's half sister Imperial Princess Fuwa. It had been 2 years since he had returned to the capital after his exile in Izu. Another candidate proposed by the courtiers Bunya no Chinu and Ôtomo no Komaru was Prince Ikeda who was son of Imperial Prince Toneri and therefore also a descendant of Emperor Tenmu. However, the decisive vote was given by Fujiwara no Nakamaro who supported the candidature of Prince Ôi, seventh son of Prince Toneri and thus a descendant of Emperor Tenmu. As a result, Nakamaro's protégé was eventually appointed to the position of Crown Prince. Interestingly enough, the Prince didn't hold any significant court ranks prior to his designation as an heir apparent. Apparently that didn't seem to have tipped the scales against his candidacy. His appointment was proclaimed in an edict issued shortly after Funado's deposition:

“大納言仲麻呂招大炊王。居於田村第。是日。遣内舍人藤原朝臣薩雄。中衛廿人。迎大炊王。立為皇太子。勅曰。”

*[Dainagon Nakamaro invited Prince Ôi to live with him at his residence Tamura no miya. On the same day, Uchitoneri Fujiwara Asomi no Hiro'o was dispatched with honorable guard of 20*

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<sup>679</sup> Ko, Haboush-Kim, Piggott: 56/57

*people to welcome and escort the Prince. Let all hear the Imperial edict: We appoint the Prince to the position of Crown Prince.]*<sup>680</sup>

The proclamation of Prince Ôi's appointment as a Crown Prince sparked criticism of the emperor, with the driving force being Tachibana no Naramaro, the son of Tachibana no Moroe. The critics were dissatisfied with the sovereign's choice, mainly due to the Crown Prince's close connection with Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Prince Ôi was married to Awata no Moroe, the widow of Fujiwara no Nakamaro's eldest son Mayori. Thus, he was seen by many as Nakamaro's son-in-law. The Dainagon also obtained permission to adopt the Prince, thus effectively becoming his father: an authority to be respected and obeyed. Moreover, the decision to let the Crown Prince settle in Nakamaro's residence Tamura no miya was seen by many as another proof that the next emperor would only be a puppet in the hands of the minister.

Kôken's decision from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) to stay at Tamura no miya for two months due to repair works taking place on the grounds of the Imperial Palace<sup>681</sup> further aggravated the dissatisfied nobles. That dissatisfaction set the beginning of the first major crisis during her reign: the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. Reported in Shoku Nihongi, the narrative covers a period of roughly two months (from the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 until the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the same year). Seven senmyô (宣命) in Old Japanese and twelve choku (勅) and shô (詔) in Chinese explain the sequence of events leading to the conspiracy and its failure. The narrative begins with a short chronicle from the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month describing Tachibana no Moroe's resignation from the office of Minister of the Left and his death shortly thereafter.<sup>682</sup> The entry continues directly with the report of Prince Yamashiro on a conspiracy led by Moroe's son Naramaro and his supporters.

“去勝宝七歳冬十一月。太上天皇不予。時、左大臣橘朝臣諸兄祗承人佐味宮守告云。大臣飲酒之庭。言辞無礼。稍有反状云云。太上天皇優容不咎。大臣知之。後歳致 [···] 至是、從四位上山背王復告。橘奈良麻呂備兵器。謀圍田村宮。正四位下大伴宿禰古麻呂亦知其情。”

*[Sami no Miyamori reported to the Retired Emperor that at the time of his illness in the winter of Tenpyô shôhō 7 (11<sup>th</sup> month), the Minister of the Left Tachibana Asomi Moroe organized a feast in his garden. Disrespectful remarks were uttered and plans [against the Emperor] were discussed. The Retired Emperor's gentle heart did not allow him to reprimand the Minister and thus his honor remained unblemished. However, the latter found out about it and resigned after many years of duty. [...] Junior Fourth Upper Rank Prince Yamashiro reported to Us that Tachibana no Naramaro prepares weapons and conspires to surround Tamura no miya. Senior Fourth Lower rank Ôtomo Sukune no Komaro also knows about and is sympathetic to the plan.]*<sup>683</sup>

Apparently even a loyal subject such as Tachibana no Moroe could have been dissatisfied with the decisions of his ruler. Considering the second part of the entry, the plans most likely had something to

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<sup>680</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.4.4

<sup>681</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.5.4

<sup>682</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.6.28

<sup>683</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.6.28

do with the succession issue. The plot to surround Tamura no miya, the residence of both Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Crown Prince Ôi, seems to have been devised with the intention to kill the former and to force the latter to abdicate. Considering the fact that the villa was also the temporary residence of the sitting sovereign, one could suppose that she was also among the targets of the conspirators. Here, it should be reminded that concerns regarding the succession arose as early as Tenpyô 17 (745), at the time of Emperor Shômu's illness. And while nothing happened during the remainder of Shômu's reign and the first years of Emperor Kôken's reign, it seems that the courtiers had simply waited for the right moment to strike. Speaking of dissatisfaction, Naramaro had any reason to be resentful of Emperor Kôken. Tachibana no Moroe had been a high official at Shômu's court and was consequently appointed first as Udaijin (Minister of the Right) and then as Sadaijin (Minister of the Left).<sup>684</sup> Due to the faithful service of the father, it was decided that his ranks and honors were to be transferred to the son upon the latter's reaching of adulthood at the age of 21. However, those expectations were not fulfilled, as Naramaro was appointed to the relatively low post of sadaiben (左大弁, Major controller of the Left who supervised four ministries: Central, Civil Services, Ceremonies, and Popular Affairs)<sup>685</sup>. The position could not be compared to the post of Minister of the Left which his father Moroe had held for a considerable period of time during his service. Furthermore, Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rise to power from Dainagon to a father-in-law and adoptive father of the Crown Prince combined with the decision that the future emperor would stay at the minister's residence could be considered another reason for Tachibana no Naramaro's displeasure over the political situation in the state. As the chronicle reports, it had been not long after the feast in Tachibana no Moroe's garden in Tenpyô shôhō 7 (755) that Moroe's son decided to act on the things discussed there.

After the report from the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (755), the narrative continues with a series of Imperial edicts. The first proclamations were issued by Emperor Kôken and her mother Empress Dowager Kômyôshi. It was first the sitting sovereign who expressed her opinion on the matter on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757).

“【S 1 6】今宣(久)頃者、王等・臣等(乃)中(爾)、無礼(久)逆在(流)人(止母)在而計(家良久。)大宮(乎)將圉(止)云而、私兵備(布止)聞看而、加遍(須)加遍(須)所念(止母)。誰奴(加)朕朝(乎)背而然為(流)人(乃)一人(母)將在(止)所念(波)。隨法不治賜。雖然、一事(乎)数人重奏賜(倍波)、可問賜物(爾夜波)將在(止)所念(止母)。慈政者行(布爾)安為(弓)此事者天下難事(爾)在者、狂迷(遍流)頑(奈留)奴心(乎波)慈悟(志)正賜(倍伎)物在(止)所念看(波奈母)如此宣(布)。此状悟而人(乃)見可咎事和射(奈世曾)。如此宣大命(爾)不從將在人(波)、朕一人極而慈賜(止母)、国法不得已成(奈牟)。己家家、己門門祖名不失勤仕奉(礼止)宣天皇大命(乎)、衆聞食(止)宣。」詔畢、更召入右大臣以下群臣。皇太后詔曰。”<sup>686</sup>

*[Recently it has come to Our attention that among the princes and nobles there are those with discourteous and treasonous hearts. They have plotted saying 'Let us surround the palace', and We have heard that they have secretly prepared their own private forces. And although We are gravely concerned, wondering how there can be even one such wretch who would harbor*

<sup>684</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (g): Tachibana no Moroe

<sup>685</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.6.16

<sup>686</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.2

*treason against Our court, these conspirators have not been dealt with according to the law. However, a number of people have reported these same circumstances, so we feel that these reports should be investigated. It is a simple thing to govern with compassion, but this rebellious plot is a danger to the realm, so we believe that the hearts of these stubborn, deluded, and misguided servants should be dealt with mercifully and with enlightenment so they can be corrected, and that is why we issue this decree. Those who realize they are in this treasonous situation should not be censured by people. But those who do not submit to this decree should be dealt with according to the law, even though We ourselves have a special affection for them. Let everyone hearken to the edict of the Sovereign, and strive to avoid bringing shame upon the reputation of their ancestral families and their own households.”<sup>687</sup>*

In the first part of the edict, Kôken portrayed herself as a benevolent and somewhat naïve ruler who eventually had been betrayed by disloyal subjects. The sentence “...these conspirators have not been dealt with according to the law” is the best indication of her intentions. As a female emperor in a man’s world which not only neglected her during her period as Crown Prince but even denied her the chance to prove herself as a capable ruler, it would have been much better for her and her reputation to deal with the conspirators in the harshest way possible. However, Emperor Kôken hesitated to do so. The reason for that becomes clear in the next line: “It is a simple thing to govern with compassion”. Thus, the impression is created that Kôken wanted to reign over the country with understanding and thus to remain in people’s memories as a merciful and benevolent sovereign. Or, at least that would have been the reason for her hesitation to punish the conspirators. However, it should not be forgotten that the sole fact that someone had been able to ascend the throne and to rule the country denies the possibility of a reign full only of compassion, mercy and benevolence. One should be prepared to defend one’s throne and position, sometimes at any cost. The notion that Kôken, a Crown Prince hated by the courtiers even before her ascension, expected the obedience of these people, with Naramaro being one of them, is hardly reasonable. Tutored by Kibi no Makibi in the tactics and strategies of the political world, she certainly would have been more suspicious of her surroundings and thus prepared to take drastic measures when the time dictated it. From that point of view, it could be concluded that Emperor Kôken saw certain benefits in creating the image of a naïve and benevolent ruler. The sentence “However, a number of people have reported these same circumstances, so we feel that these reports should be investigated.” probably unravels the mystery. After reading that sentence, one gets the impression that it was not the emperor but rather those “number of people” who expected the punishment of the rebels. Urged by the pleas of her subjects, the ruler could not have turned a blind eye to them in order to defend the conspirators, and had to act accordingly. All in all, it could be assumed that in her first edict concerning the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro, Emperor Kôken deliberately decided to play the role of the victim, while at the same time she intended to punish the perpetrators in the harshest way possible. Similar to her father, however, she needed a justification for her actions. While Shômu used religion and oracles, his daughter used the pretence of the loyal subjects who demanded the punishment of the conspirators. If one considers that possibility objectively, it seems that Kôken was much smarter than her father. While the previous sovereign used religion – something ephemeral and highly unreliable which did not possess the ability to intervene in the people’s affairs through direct actions, his successor used people – living creatures who could be relied upon if one knew how to influence them, or who, in the worst case, could even take the blame for her failure.

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<sup>687</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 29

Then, the edict of Emperor Kōken was followed by two from her mother, Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi. In an edict from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 1 (757), she appealed to the traitors:

“又大伴・佐伯宿禰等(波)、自遠天皇御世、内(乃)兵(止)為而仕奉來。又大伴宿禰等(波)吾族(爾母)在。諸同心(爾)為而皇朝(乎)助仕奉(牟)時(爾)、如是醜事者聞(曳自)。汝(多知乃)不能(爾)依(亘志)如是在(良志)。諸以明清心皇朝(乎)助仕奉(礼止)宣。”<sup>688</sup>

*[Moreover, Lords Ōtomo no Sukune and Saeki no Sukune have from the reigns of distant Emperors served as Our close military retainers and guards, and you, the Ōtomo, are indeed of our own family. When all of you serve the imperial court with one heart such rebellious intentions are unheard of. It is only due to your lack of integrity that such things can occur. We command that all of you serve the imperial court and aid it with bright and pure hearts.]*<sup>689</sup>

In her next edict, she went even further and pleaded with them:

“【S 1 8】塩焼等五人(乎)人告謀反。汝等為吾近人。一(毛)吾(乎)可怨事者不所念。汝等(乎)皇朝者己已太久高治賜(乎)、何(乎)怨(志岐)所(止志亘加)然將為。不有(加止奈母)所念。是以、汝等罪者免賜。今徃前然莫為(止)宣。”<sup>690</sup>

*[It has been reported that Shioyaki and the others are plotting treason. You are all Our close relatives. It is inconceivable that even one of you would turn against Us. All of you have served in the court with high rank – how can you harbor any resentment toward the imperial court? Such a thing cannot be! Therefore We pardon your crimes. Hereafter you shall not commit such acts again! Thus We decree.]*<sup>691</sup>

Considering the possibility of her daughter's deposition at the hands of the conspirators, these words of the Empress Dowager sound suspicious, which further strengthens the impression of an intentionally created image for both her and Emperor Kōken. It could be assumed that the initial edicts of the mother-daughter duo in regard to Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy were well planned and constructed in order to depict weak and naïve women betrayed by cunning and power-hungry men. The Empress Dowager's second edict, however, revealed the information that Prince Shioyaki, the husband of Kōken's half sister Imperial Princess Fuwa, had also been acquainted with the plan. Objectively speaking, the Prince, similar to Tachibana no Naramaro, also had his reasons to be dissatisfied with the emperor. After all, he had been one of the candidates for Crown Prince and was even recommended by Fujiwara no Nagate and Fujiwara no Toyonari. His only "fault" had been that he was the older brother of the deposed Crown Prince Funado and it was probably that fact which also played a role against his candidacy.

Anyway, the tone of the edicts suddenly changed in the next few days. The reason for that could have been the confession of Mutsunokami Saeki no Matanari believed to have been one of the conspirators. According to it,

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<sup>688</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 1.7.2 【S 1 7】

<sup>689</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 30

<sup>690</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 1.7.3

<sup>691</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 31

“去天平十七年。先帝陛下幸難波。寢膳乖宜。于時、奈良麻呂謂全成曰。陛下枕席不安。殆至大漸。然猶無立皇嗣。恐有變乎。願率多治比國人。多治比犢養。小野東人。立黃文而為君。以答百姓之望。大伴・佐伯之族、隨於此舉、前將無敵。”

*[When the previous Emperor went to Nanba in Tenpyô 17, [his condition became worse as] he didn't have much appetite and couldn't sleep well. At the time, Naramaro told himself that even though the Emperor's condition now gradually improved, the Crown Prince was not yet [firmly] established. In case the Emperor should die, disturbances would occur. Therefore, I [Naramaro] implore Tajihi no Kunihito, Tajihi no Kôshikai and Ono no Azumahito [to help me to] put Prince Kibumi on the throne and thus to answer the wishes of the common people. If the clans Ôtomo and Saeki stand on our side, then the victory would definitely be ours.]*<sup>692</sup>

The confession pointed out the fact that regardless of Emperor Kôken's intentions to maintain her good image, she would be hated by Naramaro and his supporters forever. And while previously they wanted to remove her from the position of Crown Prince and replace her with Prince Kibumi, it was now that they wanted to have her dethroned. Thus, it seemed that the peaceful image which Kôken wanted to maintain throughout the conspiracy would have to be destroyed, an assumption which finds its confirmation in the edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757).

“比者、頑奴潜凶反逆。皇天不遠。羅令伏誅。民間或有假託亡魂。浮言紛紜。擾乱鄉邑者。不論輕重。皆与同罪。普告遐邇、宜絶源。」又勅曰。”

*["For those obstinate fellows who conceal their agendas and plan treason, the heavens above are not far away. Let the orders be spread out that the death penalty would be given to those who spread false rumours and disturb the people regardless of the weight of their crime. Whether far or close, all those who commit such an offense would be punished until the source of the evil is cut off."]*<sup>693</sup>

The word choice in that Imperial edict strongly contrasts with those in the edicts proclaimed previously by both the emperor and her mother. While in her previous proclamations one finds Kôken's good will toward the traitors, here one finds her intention to punish all who dare to oppose her, which practically destroys the image of a benevolent and naïve ruler. Considering the fact that in the process of revealing the conspiracy, the emperor found out that not only nobles (Naramaro and the clans Saeki and Ôtomo) but also Imperial descendants (Prince Kibumi) and even members of her own family (Prince Shioyaki) were against her, the decision to change her attitude toward the conspirators should not be considered controversial. With so many powerful opponents, Kôken couldn't afford herself the luxury to maintain the image of a benevolent and merciful ruler. She had to show decisiveness and strong will in order to be able to punish her enemies. In that way, she would have defended not only her position as an emperor but also the honor and the authority of the Imperial House. Notwithstanding the fact that Emperor Kôken was a woman and regarded by many as a “temporary solution” of the succession issue, a conspiracy with the intention to dethrone her would have had a detrimental effect on the Imperial authority, as it would have been a sign for the nobles that they could easily change rulers according to their own whims. From that point of view, the sovereign had to drastically change her strategy. To maintain a good image was not already a possibility.

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<sup>692</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.4

<sup>693</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.8



The narrative of the conspiracy ends with the Imperial edict from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757): a proclamation unique not only because it puts an end to a whole series of Shoku Nihongi entries but also because of its style and composition.

“【S 1 9】明神大八洲所知倭根子天皇大命(良麻止)宣大命(乎)、親王・王・臣百官人等、天下公民、衆聞宣。高天原神積坐(須)皇親神魯岐・神魯弥命(乃)定賜来(流)天日嗣高御座次(乎)加蘇(毘)奪將盜(止)為而惡逆在奴久奈多夫礼。麻度比。奈良麻呂。古麻呂等(伊)、逆党(乎)伊射奈(比)率而、先内相家(乎)圍而其(乎)殺而、即大殿(乎)圍而皇太子(乎)退而、次者皇太后朝(乎)傾、鈴印契(乎)取而、召右大臣而天下(爾)号令使為(牟)。然後廢帝、四王中(爾)簡而為君(牟止)謀而、六月廿九日(乃)夜、入太政官坊而、歃塩汁而誓、礼天地四方而、七月二日、發兵(牟止)謀定而、二日未時、小野東人、喚中衛舍人備前国上道郡人上道朝臣斐太都而誦云(久)。此事俱佐左西(止)伊射奈(布爾)依而、俱佐西(牟止)事者許而、其日亥時、具奏賜(都)。由此勘問賜(爾)、每事实(止)申而皆罪(爾)伏(奴)。是以、勘法(爾)、皆当死罪。在如此雖在、慈賜(止)為而、一等輕賜而、姓名易而、遠流罪(爾)治賜(都)。此誠天地神(乃)慈賜(比)護賜(比)、挂畏開闢已来御于天皇大御靈(多知乃)穢奴等(乎)伎良(比)賜棄賜(布爾)依(互)。又盧舍那如来、觀世音菩薩、護法梵王・帝釈四大天王(乃)不可思議威神之力(爾)依(互志)。此逆在惡奴等者顯出而、悉罪(爾)伏(奴良志止奈母)、神(奈賀良母)所念行(須止)宣天皇大命(乎)、衆聞食宣。事別宣(久)。久奈多夫礼(良爾)所= [言+圭] 誤百姓(波)京土履(牟)事穢(弥)、出羽国小勝村(乃)柵戸(爾)移賜(久止)宣天皇大命(乎)、衆聞食宣。”<sup>694</sup>

*[Let the words of the Empress and Beloved Child of Yamato, ruling the Great Land of Many Islands as a manifest god, be proclaimed and let all pay heed – all the imperial princes, princes, the ministers, the hundred officials and lesser officials of all under Heaven – let all give ear, thus I proclaim. The High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession, established and ruled over by the August Imperial Male and Female Deities seated in the High Plain of Heaven has been attacked by evil and treacherous slaves seeking to wrest the Succession away by force. These evildoers – Prince Kibumi, Deposed Crown Prince Funado, Tachibana no Naramaro, Komaro and others – leading a party of traitors sought to 1) surround the mansion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and kill him; 2) surround the palace of the Crown Prince and set him aside; 3) descend on the palace of the Empress Dowager and steal the bells, seals and tokens; 4) and summon the Great Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Toyonari and put the rulership of the realm into his hands. Finally 5) they planned to depose the Empress Kōken and to put one of the four princes on the throne.*

*On the night of the 29th of the sixth month, they met in the garden of the Great Council of State, sipped salt water and swore an oath, and bowed to Heaven and Earth and the Four Corners, determining their plot to raise troops and attack on the second day of the seventh month. On the afternoon of the second day, at the hour of the ram, Ono no Azumabito called upon the Imperial Attendant and Head of the Middle Imperial Guard, Kamitsumichi no Asomi Hidatsu of*

<sup>694</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.12

*Kamitsumichi District, Bizen Province, and invited him to join the attack. Hidatsu dissembled, pretending to agree, but at the hour of the boar reported all the details to the Court. Thus the conspirators were interrogated and all the details of Hidatsu's report proving to be true, the guilty were punished.*

*"Now according to the law all were guilty of high treason and deserved death. However, We in Our mercy lightened the sentence and merely changed the kabane of some or sentenced them to distant exile. That the filthy and detestable wretches have been swept away is indeed due to the compassion and protection of the kami of Heaven and Earth and the awesome and fearsome divine spirits of the Imperial Sovereigns who have ruled from the Creation. Further is this due to the incredible power of the Rushana Tathāgata, Kanzeon Bodhisattva, and the Protectors of the Law – Brahma, Indra, and the Four Great Heavenly Kings. Thus the wicked slaves who conspired have all been exposed and punished. These are the divine words of the Empress who reigns and pronounces even as a god. Let all hear these words.*

*"As a separate matter, the common people who were deceived by Kuna Tabure are not fit to besmirch the soil of the Capital. Therefore let them be moved to Okachi Village in Dewa Province to farm the land. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>695</sup>*

The first paragraph of the edict is a remarkable example of what Ross Bender calls "*florid and archaic-sounding prefaces*".<sup>696</sup> In accordance with the Ritsuryō law system, extraordinary occasions such as the designation of a crown prince or accession of an emperor called for the usage of the so-called official phraseology. However, the preface of that edict is more richly decorated with standard phrases than any other of Emperor Kōken's proclamations. Upon reading it, one gets the impression that a certain type of Shintō language is used as a means for justification of the emperor's authority. As Bender points out,

*"I would assert that the peculiar Old Japanese terminology of the senmyō prefaces is indeed a type of proto-Shinto language, embodying along with the accounts of the Age of the Gods in Kojiki and Nihon Shoki the nascent concepts of the native kami cult."<sup>697</sup>*

The first peculiarity of that edict is its opening phrase: "*Let the words of the Empress and Beloved Child of Yamato, ruling the Great Land of Many Islands as a manifest god, be proclaimed...*" [明神大八洲所知倭根子天皇大命良麻止宣大命; *Akitsukami to ohoyashima shirashimesu yamatoneko sumera ga ohomikoto rama to noritamafu ohomikoto*]. As Bender points out, the word "*akitsukami*" can be translated as "*the god who is visible or "manifest" in this world ruling all under heaven*".<sup>698</sup> According to Bender, Motoori Norinaga likens the said phrase to the one found in the Nihonshoki's chronicles in regard to the emperors Keikō and Yūryaku: "*arahitokami*" [現人神]<sup>699</sup>. In contrast to that, the word "*ohomikoto*" is not a one "reserved" only for Imperial edicts. Bender points out that the same word could be seen in many places in Manyōshū with the meaning of "*imperial ancestor*".<sup>700</sup> The word "*yamatoneko*" is often found in Nihon shoki as a part of an emperor's title. According to Herbert Zachert's translation of the Imperial edicts of Shoku Nihongi, it means "*das liebe Kind von Yamato*".<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 32/33

<sup>696</sup> Bender (b) 2010: 229

<sup>697</sup> Bender (b) 2010: 230

<sup>698</sup> Bender (b) 2010: 230

<sup>699</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 230

<sup>700</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 231

<sup>701</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Zachert 1932: 203

On the other hand, Bender cites Herman Ooms who translates “*neko*” as “*root child*” and emphasizes the fact that the term is often found as part of some emperors’ names. Furthermore, Ooms makes a direct comparison between the emperors whose official names bear the component “*ame*” [天] and those whose names contain „*neko*” as a contrast between rulers connected with the heavenly deities and those connected with the earthly deities.<sup>702</sup> All those phrases which actually mean one and the same thing: “emperor”, were probably used by Kōken with the intention to emphasize her connection with both her Imperial predecessors and the godly ancestors of the Imperial family, and thus to elevate her own authority.

According to Bender, the part of the preface which reads “*The High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession, established and ruled over by the August Imperial Male and Female Deities seated in the High Plain of Heaven...*” [高天原神積坐須皇親神魯岐神魯弥命乃定賜来流天日嗣高御座次乎; *Takama no hara ni kamu zumari masu sumera ga mutsu kamuroki kamuromi no mikoto no sadame tamahikeru amatsu hitsugi takamikura no tsugite*] is another way of justification of Imperial legitimacy.<sup>703</sup> Once more Motoori Norinaga is cited:

“...this is the throne established by Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大御神 and Takamimisuhi no mikoto 高御産巢日命, with the command that Amaterasu’s descendants should reign in the central land of Toyoashihara 豊葦原 [...]. A special point of interest here is the phrase *kamuroki kamuromi no mikoto*. As noted above, this unusual expression occurs only four times in the *senmyō*. Norinaga states that it may refer explicitly to Izanagi 伊邪那岐 and Izanami 伊邪那美, or perhaps to all the male and female imperial ancestral deities down to Amaterasu Ōmikami [...].”<sup>704</sup>

Thus, it could be concluded that the last female ruler of Nara Japan used the phrase in order to emphasize her connection with not only the main deity of the Shintō pantheon Amaterasu but also with ancestor deities such as Izanami and Izanagi. In that train of thought, the sentence could be interpreted as the sovereign’s way to stress the fact that she had been directly chosen by the Sun Goddess, and was therefore protected not only by her but also by the ancestor deities and all previous living deities (emperors) who had established and supported the Imperial House. In a nutshell, the whole preface of the edict emphasizes the ultimate authority of the emperor and, by extension, her right to punish those who dare to violate her godly nature.

In contrast to the first strongly Shintō-oriented paragraph, the third part of the edict is filled with Buddhist and Hindu references and creates the impression that the sovereign was protected not only by the Shintō deities but also by the Buddhist and Hinduist ones. As Bender points out,

“The Buddhist doctrine of divine protection of the state (*gokoku shisō* 護国思想) was of course a major emphasis in the sutras popular at the Nara court. The three sutras *Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經 (*Suvarṇa-prabhāsa sūtra*), *Ninnōkyō* 仁王經 (*Kāruṇika-rāja sūtra*) and *Hokkekyō* 法華經 (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka sūtra*) were characterized as the “Three Sutras for the Protection of the State,” granting various Buddhas’ protection especially to kings and nations which revered the Dharma, and the provincial temples established by Emperor Shōmu were named after the first

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<sup>702</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 231

<sup>703</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 231

<sup>704</sup> Bender (b) 2010: 231/232

of the three. Descriptions of this cosmic Buddha are found both in the Kegon 華嚴經 (Avataṃsaka sūtra) and Bonmō 梵網經 (Brahmājāla sūtra) sutras which were in vogue at the time. The latter sutra, focusing on the initiatory Bodhisattiva vows, was apparently seen as a companion to the immense Kegon sutra, although its depiction of the cosmic Buddha Rushana is just as vivid as that of the more frequently-cited Kegon. The four great Heavenly Kings had been popular since the earliest days of Buddhism in Japan, giving their name to one of the temples allegedly founded by Prince Shōtoku. They are described in the Konkōmyōkyō as the guardian deva kings of the four quarters [...]. Brahma (Jp. Bonnō) and Indra (Jp. Taishaku) are associated at least in art historical terms more with esoteric Buddhism, which was making its entry into the Japanese scene in mid-Nara times along with exotic Indian deities such as Kichijoten and Bishamonten [...]. Both Brahma and Indra make their debut in Shoku Nihongi in this senmyō, appearing again in Shōtoku's later Senmyō #43 in 769. It should be noted that Indra is invoked also in the imperial edict translated below in connection with a keka 悔過 ritual of repentance conducted by Buddhist priests for the rest of the soul of the late Emperor Shōmu, and is the only Buddhist deity to appear in that more Confucian-oriented text."<sup>705</sup>

The mention of all those deities shows Kōken's intention to strengthen her position by utilizing the protection of not only the native kami but also of the Buddhist divinities. As some of them are brought up in sutras chanted to ensure the safety of states and their rulers, it could be assumed that the emperor once more tried to emphasize her position as the undisputable ruler of the state. After all, an unworthy ruler would not have been protected by deities which in principle give their support only to rightfully governed states.

In sum, it could be concluded that the preface of the first paragraph and the second half of the third paragraph mark the beginning of a tendency which could be seen more clearly during the second reign of the last female ruler of Nara Japan: the internal struggle between her Buddhist faith and her duties toward the native beliefs of the country. Considering the structure of the edict and the strongly Shintō-oriented first paragraph, it seems that preference was given to the native deities and their protection of the rightful ruler of the state, probably due to the fact that the matter discussed had been an internal one. However, Kōken's Buddhist faith was clearly expressed in the third paragraph, most likely intentionally, in order to stress the point that she was protected not only by the native deities but also by the foreign ones. Thus, the edict fulfills its purpose: to justify Emperor Kōken's position as the undisputed ruler of the state, one directly chosen and supported by both Buddhist and Shintō deities.

Excluding the parts which emphasize the authority of the sovereign, the remaining part of the senmyō gives further information about the conspiracy and also names the main perpetrators: "*Prince Kibumi, Deposed Crown Prince Funado, Tachibana no Naramaro, Komaro and others*". Surprisingly enough, the name of Prince Shioyaki is not among them. Among the four names mentioned, the involvement of the former two, Prince Kibumi and the deposed Crown Prince Funado, makes much sense. Prince Kibumi was considered a potential candidate for the throne even by Emperor Shōmu due to his connection with the Fujiwara family and his descent from Emperor Tenmu's bloodline. Him being a son of Prince Nagaya, who had been forced to commit suicide due to accusations of treason at the beginning of Shōmu's reign, could be considered his only disadvantage. On the other end of that axis stood Prince Funado who had already seen the throne within his arm's reach only for it to be snatched away from him by Emperor Kōken. The reasoning of Naramaro and his supporters was already clear enough. They were dissatisfied with the growing influence of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and also couldn't

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<sup>705</sup> Bender (b) 2010: 232/233

accept the fact that a woman would not stick to her role as “throneholder” but would want to exert authority as an actual sovereign instead. Interestingly enough, that edict continues the tendency which could be seen in all Shoku Nihongi entries (both chronicles and proclamations) narrating the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro – to add new names to the list of conspirators. The first entry from the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) mentions the names of Tachibana no Moroe and his son Naramaro. And while the name of the former Minister of the Left is given only in connection with a supposedly old plot, Naramaro is described as the main figure behind the conspiracy against Fujiwara no Nakamaro, Crown Prince Ôi and Emperor Kôken. Then, the first edict of Empress Dowager Kômyôshi from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) names the heads of the clans Ôtomo and Saeki as men involved in the conspiracy. Her second edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) adds the name of Prince Shioyaki to the group. Emperor Kôken’s senmyô from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month reveals also the names of Prince Kibumi and Prince Funado. The last Imperial edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) that narrates the aftermath of the conspiracy, as well as the punishments exacted on the conspirators further adds the names of Kamo no Tsunotari, Tajihî no Kunihito, Tajihî no Kôshikai, Ono no Azumahito and Prince Asukabe. If one compares all edicts regarding the conspiracy, the names of all people who supposedly had been part of it are mentioned separately in one or another proclamation, but they could not be found in all of them. Even Naramaro’s name is mentioned only sporadically and not in all edicts and chronicles concerning the conspiracy. He was nonetheless accused of being the main culprit behind the whole plot.

Considering the scope of the conspiracy narrated in the Imperial proclamations, one could expect serious punishments to have been exacted on the conspirators, especially on the main culprit Tachibana no Naramaro. Surprisingly enough, however, there is no information in Shoku Nihongi, or for that matter in any other old source, about any sentences having been imposed on him or his family. At the same time, however, there is historical evidence that members of his family survived the conspiracy. Naramaro’s son Kiyotomo lived until 789 and even held high office at the court of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781 – 806). The daughter of Kiyotomo, Kachiko, became the chief consort of Emperor Saga (r. 809 – 823) and even bore him his successor, the future Emperor Ninmyô (r. 833 – 850). During Ninmyô’s reign, Naramaro was posthumously given the title of Dajô-daijin in 837.<sup>706</sup> That fact alone would suffice to put the credibility of the statement about a conspiracy against Emperor Kôken in jeopardy. A rebellion against the rightful sovereign, regardless of his gender, would have been considered equal to a revolt against all rulers of the state (previous, current and future). Then, by rewarding Naramaro posthumously with the highest political position in the state, Emperor Ninmyô would have accepted a rebel’s view that the emperor could not choose his own Crown Prince, a prerogative which could be considered an indelible part of the Imperial authority. At the same time, in contrast to the lack of information about Tachibana no Naramaro’s punishment, Emperor Kôken’s edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) gives more detailed information about the sentences given to his supporters: the princes Funado and Kibumi, Ôtomo no Komaro, Tajihî no Kôshikai, Ono no Azumahito and Kamo no Tsunotari. According to the chronicle, the names of Kibumi, Funado and Tsunotari were changed to Tabure (多夫礼, “the stupid one”), Madoi (麻度比, “the delusional one”) and Noroshi (乃呂志, “the ignorant one”), respectively. Considering the fact that during Emperor Shôtoku’s reign the names of Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister the nun Hôkin were changed due to accusation of deliberately deceiving the sovereign, it could be assumed that a forceful change of someone’s name was considered a heavy punishment. Furthermore, all people mentioned above were beaten with wooden sticks and eventually died from the torture. Other people involved

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<sup>706</sup> See Bender (b) 2010: 226/227

such as Prince Asukabe were banished together with their wives and children.<sup>707</sup> Similar to Tachibana no Naramaro's case, however, one could have expected much more serious punishments if definite evidence was found against all people mentioned as conspirators. The members of the Imperial family supposedly involved in the plot would surely have been executed. Instead, the names of several people were changed, some were beaten with wooden sticks, while others were sent into exile: on the whole, sentences, the severity of which did not correspond to the crimes committed by the perpetrators.

Interesting was also the fate of Prince Shioyaki, supposedly also one of the conspirators. His name was eventually cleared of suspicion with Emperor Kôken's edict from the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757):

“【S 2 0】塩焼王者唯預四王之列。然不会謀庭。亦不被告。而縁道祖王者、応配遠流罪。然其父新田部親王、以清明心仕奉親王也。可絶其家門(夜止)為(奈母)、此般罪免給。自今往前者以明直心仕奉朝廷(止)詔。”<sup>708</sup>

*[Although Prince Shioyaki was numbered among the four princes who were to be candidates for Emperor, he did not himself attend the conspiratorial meetings in the garden, and he had no knowledge of the plot. However, since he is the older brother of Prince Funado, he was sentenced to distant exile. Nevertheless, his father Imperial Prince Niitabe served the Court loyally with a clear and bright heart. Now we pardon Prince Shioyaki so that his father's house should not come to an end. From now on let him also serve the Court loyally with a pure and regenerated heart. Thus We decree.]*<sup>709</sup>

Thus, the last edict concerning Naramaro's conspiracy only creates further controversies. According to it and contrary to the second edict of Empress Dowager Kômuyôshi from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757), Prince Shioyaki “*did not himself attend the conspiratorial meetings in the garden, and he had no knowledge of the plot.*” Interestingly enough, however, the prince was still sent into exile, the reason being his blood ties to Prince Funado. Then, the senmyô goes further declaring that the prince was pardoned thanks to his father Prince Niitabe's loyal service, with the emperor once more trying to revive the image of the benevolent and merciful ruler that had been tarnished in the course of the conspiracy. Similar to the previous edict concerning the punishments exacted on the conspirators, the proclamation in regard to Prince Shioyaki raises more questions instead of giving answers. Firstly, why was his name mentioned in the second edict of Empress Dowager Kômuyôshi, only for the prince's commitment to the conspiracy to be denied by Emperor Kôken herself several days later? Secondly, why was the prince punished simply due to his blood ties to Prince Funado who, albeit a conspirator, was not disciplined as severely as one could have expected? Comparing the punishments of the two brothers: the one who supposedly knew and actively participated in the conspiracy and the other who didn't have any knowledge of it, then it turns out that the sentence given to the latter was much more severe than that of the former. Furthermore, if one compares the lack of information about Tachibana no Naramaro's punishment to the sentences given to the princes Funado and Shioyaki, then it seems that the mastermind behind the whole conspiracy was not as guilty as the participants in it, or even as the persons who didn't know about the plan.

In sum, it could be assumed that the way in which the emperor took care of the conspiracy was not as thorough as it could have been expected. Firstly, it seems that Kôken was not completely aware of all

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<sup>707</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.4

<sup>708</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.7.27

<sup>709</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 34

people committed to Naramaro's plan. The inconsistency in the information given with each and every edict by her and her mother the Empress Dowager proves that. Secondly, it seems that the emperor was somewhat torn between her initial wish to support the image of a benevolent and merciful ruler and the urgency to punish all conspirators in accordance with the crime committed by them. It should be noted that her first and her last edict concerning the conspiracy speak of mercy and forgiveness. At the same time, however, it should also not be forgotten that all members of the Imperial family who in one way or another had been involved in the conspiracy were punished, some more severely than the others. Unique is also the case of Prince Shioyaki who, as it eventually turned out, was sent into exile only due to his blood ties to a conspirator. Considering all these facts or the lack thereof, it could be assumed that the emperor seemed to have been more intimately involved in Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy than simply as one of the targets of the plot. The lack of information about Naramaro's punishment could be attributed to Kôken's unwillingness to report "unimportant" things. Instead, the sentences of the Imperial princes had to be narrated in detail for her to be able to emphasize her readiness to take care of her political opponents. Even if the conspiracy was not entirely created by Emperor Kôken in an attempt to get rid of her political opponents, it could be assumed that at least the number of the conspirators, as well as their position at court were manipulated by her. In addition, considering that the whole plot took place only three months after the deposition of Prince Funado, then it could be assumed that Emperor Kôken used the dissatisfaction of a courtier (in the case, Tachibana no Naramaro) in order to get rid of her political opponents or those members of the Imperial family who had the potential to threaten her position in the future. But, as it became clear from the way in which Kôken handled the whole conspiracy, it seems that she pursued more than one goal. Thus, the ruination of the Tachibana family could be considered another benefit for the sovereign. Even if Naramaro's punishment was not recorded in Shoku Nihongi, the lone fact that he was revealed as the mastermind behind the conspiracy would have brought disgrace on his family. Thus, the Tachibana clan would not have had the political influence to stir the political world, at least during Emperor Kôken's reign. Then, by defending Fujiwara no Nakamaro and his adopted son Crown Prince Ôi, the emperor not only protected the authority of the Imperial family but also was able to, at least temporarily, earn the loyalty of a powerful courtier. Furthermore, by continuously stating in the edicts regarding the conspiracy that she couldn't take measures against the conspirators with a light heart, she showed her determination to create the image of a benevolent and good-natured ruler. And last but not least, by stating in her longest edict regarding the plot that she was protected by both the indigenous and Buddhist deities, the emperor once more justified her position as the rightful ruler of the state. Regardless of whether the conspiracy was real or not, the way in which Emperor Kôken managed to overcome it showed remarkable strength of character and political ability. From that moment on, the sovereign could concentrate on the political affairs at court.

The following Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) reports the elevation in rank of one or another courtier as a reward for their loyalty during the conspiracy.

“【S 2 2】此遍(乃)政、明淨(久)仕奉(礼留爾)依而治賜人(母)在。又愛盛(爾)一二人等(爾)冠位上賜治賜(久止)宣。”<sup>710</sup>

*[During the recent crisis, there were those who served the Court loyally with clear and bright hearts and thus We were able to govern and suppress the conspiracy. These are to be commended and a number of them shall be rewarded with court rank. Thus We decree.]*<sup>711</sup>

<sup>710</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.8.4

<sup>711</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 36

It could even be speculated that the said edict draws an imaginary line in Kôken's reign and divides it into two periods: one before the conspiracy and one after it. According to Shoku Nihongi, the period before the conspiracy showed Kôken's disinterest in politics and her concentration on religion and on her duties toward her ailing father. During and after the conspiracy, Emperor Kôken herself revealed her other face – that of a politically cunning and intelligent ruler who would not yield to the hardships which one on such a high position would typically encounter.

Nevertheless, it seemed that the conspiracy and Kôken's need to protect her throne took their toll on the emperor's physical and psychological condition. In the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 2 (758), she decided to abdicate in favor of the Crown Prince chosen by her, Prince Ôi.

“【S 2 3】現神御宇天皇詔旨(良麻止)詔勅(乎)、親王・諸王・諸臣・百官人等、衆聞食宣。高天原神積坐皇親神魯棄神魯美命吾孫知食国天下(止)、事依奉(乃)任(爾)、遠皇祖御世始(弓)天皇御世御世聞看来天日嗣高御座(乃)業(止奈母)随神所念行(久止)宣天皇勅、衆聞食宣。加久聞看来天日嗣高御座(乃)業(波)、天坐神・地坐祇(乃)相字豆奈(比)奉相扶奉事(爾)依(弓之)此座平安御座(弓)、天下者所知物(爾)在(良自止奈母)随神所念行(須)。然皇(止)坐(弓)天下政(乎)聞看事者、勞(岐)重(棄)事(爾)在(家利)。年長(久)日多(久)此座坐(波)、荷重力弱(之弓)不堪負荷。加以、掛畏朕婆婆皇太后朝(爾母)人子之理(爾)不得定省(波)、朕情(母)日夜不安。是以、此位避(弓)間(乃)人(爾)在(弓之)如理婆婆(爾波)仕奉(倍自止)所念行(弓奈母)日嗣(止)定賜(弊流)皇太子(爾)授賜(久止)宣天皇御命、衆聞食宣。是日。皇太子受禪、即天皇位於大極殿。詔曰。”<sup>712</sup>

*[Let all – imperial princes, princes, ministers, and the hundred officials – hear the edict which is proclaimed as the command of the Empress who rules the land as a manifest god. Let all hearken to the imperial edict issued by the Empress, who in the body of a god rules the land from the High Throne from which for generations the Emperors have ruled, beginning with the reign of the distant Imperial ancestors, just as the distant Imperial ancestors, the male and female kami in the High Plain of Heaven, decreed that their descendants should rule the Realm of All Under Heaven. We consider that in the body of a god We should rule the Realm, assisted in maintaining the peace and stability of the Imperial rank by the gods who are in heaven and the gods who are on earth, in wondrous unity, in the task of the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession.*

*However ruling over the Realm as Empress is a weighty matter and cause of suffering. Serving in this rank the years are long and the days are many, and to Us this is a burden; Our strength is weak and We cannot bear it. And not this only, but day and night Our heart is uneasy, since as a child We have not time to devote the care that is expected of a daughter toward Our Mother, the Dowager Empress, whose name is invoked with awe and fear. Thus, thinking to have time to devote Ourselves to the care of Our Revered Mother, We decree that We shall leave our Rank, and that the Sun Succession shall pass to the designated Crown Prince. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]*<sup>713</sup>

<sup>712</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 2.8

<sup>713</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 37



Apparently Kôken's intention to nurse Empress Dowager Kômyôshi was the reason for her decision to step down from the throne. Here, one could compare the way in which the emperor took care of her father Retired Emperor Shômu while he was ill to the way in which she handled the challenge of fulfilling her duties toward her mother Empress Dowager Kômyôshi. In the first case, she could take care of her father without having to abdicate, while in the second case, she felt so much pressure that she decided to give up the throne for her mother. Interestingly enough, Shoku Nihongi's chronicles create the impression that Kôken had a much more intimate relationship with her father than with her mother, the reason for that probably having been Shômu's intention to leave his daughter as his successor on the throne and the need to educate and advise her accordingly. From that point of view, Kôken's decision to abdicate in favor of Prince Ôi in order to take care of her mother could not be easily understood. According to Takinami Sadako, the possibility that Kôken abdicated only because of her sick mother is implausible.<sup>714</sup> Although Prince Ôi was a Crown Prince chosen by her, the time span between his appointment and his ascension to the throne was only a year and four months. Similar to him, Emperor Monmu was enthroned after only six months as a Crown Prince, but, as Takinami points out, Monmu's circumstances had been completely different from those of Prince Ôi, the future Emperor Junnin, with the former's ascension having been rather an exception than a rule in the succession tradition of the Japanese Imperial House.<sup>715</sup> Regardless of the gender, there was the unwritten law within the Imperial House that a Crown Prince ought to ascend the throne only after he had had enough time to get acquainted with his new duties and responsibilities. For example, Kôken's father, Shômu, ascended the throne after 10 years as a Crown Prince, while Kôken remained in history as the Crown Prince who waited the longest before her enthronement: 11 years. Therefore, Takinami maintains the opinion that the reasons for Emperor Kôken's abdication should be sought elsewhere.

An alternative answer could be found in the political developments around Fujiwara no Nakamaro, Empress Kômyôshi's nephew and Kôken's cousin, and also Crown Prince Ôi's adoptive father and father-in-law. At the time, his position in the government (dainagon) did not ensure him a stable political influence at court. Therefore, he relied much more on his post of Shibinaishô, the director of Shibichûdai (the transformed Empress Dowager's Household Agency), which he was given due to the support of his aunt. However, with Empress Kômyôshi's failing health, the Shibichûdai began to lose its meaning and influence. Faced with the perspective of its initial function disappearing, it would have been only a matter of time before the Shibichûdai's importance as a military and administrative organization in service of Empress Kôken outside the Ritsuryô system also diminished. In order to cement his faltering positions, Nakamaro surely tried to push forward the coronation of Prince Ôi who, having been his adopted son and, more importantly, his guest at Tamura no miya, had become nothing more than a puppet in his hands. Takinami speculates that it was actually Fujiwara no Nakamaro who suggested that Emperor Kôken abdicates in Prince Ôi's favor in order to take care of her sick mother.<sup>716</sup> Based on the second paragraph of her abdication edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 2 (758), one could see that the emperor was somewhat unsure about her own decision. It is peculiar that she mentioned the *"...ruling over the Realm as Empress is a weighty matter and cause of suffering."* or that *"to Us this is a burden; Our strength is weak and We cannot bear it."* as potential reasons for her abdication. Even during the series of events concerning Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy did she not dare utter such phrases in any of her edicts. From that point of view, the possibility that Kôken abdicated because of her unwillingness to embrace the Imperial duties and responsibilities seems highly unlikely.

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<sup>714</sup> See Takinami 1998: 116

<sup>715</sup> See Takinami 1998: 116

<sup>716</sup> See Takinami 1998: 117

Regardless of whether Kômyôshi's sickness was the main reason for Kôken's abdication, the emperor stepped down in favor of Crown Prince Ôi who ascended the throne as Emperor Junnin. The reign of the new sovereign was strongly marked by Fujiwara no Naramaro's rapid rise to power, another fact which could potentially support the theory about Nakamaro's involvement in Emperor Kôken's abdication. Upon his ascension, Junnin decided to undertake drastic changes in the old Ritsuryô system. As a result, the different offices and ministries were renamed to correspond to those of Tang China.<sup>717</sup> Thus, the Shibichûdai was renamed to Kongukan in 758. Moreover, it was defined as an organization to receive the Imperial orders and convey them to government officials. As a result, Shibinaishô was put in a position to deliver and implement the orders of Emperor Junnin in place of the Dajôkan, and became an organization comparable to the Great Council of State both in name and reality. Nakamaro served as its head from the very beginning, so it could have been expected that he would continue to use the Kongukan to strengthen his political position. However, those expectations were not fulfilled and the position of head of Kongukan became vacant when Nakamaro was appointed Minister of the Right (udaijin, at the time "taiho" (大保; Grand Protector)) in 758 and became the head of the Dajôkan shortly thereafter. Nakamaro's vacating the position of head of Kongukan seemed to have marked the organization's downfall. Its significance began to fade gradually even though it remained in Nakamaro's charge. Eventually, the Kongukan was abolished after the death of Empress Dowager Kômyôshi in 760 (according to some sources, its life had been a bit longer – until 762)<sup>718</sup>. Anyway, in the same 758, Fujiwara no Nakamaro was given the honorary name "Emi no Oshikatsu" (恵美押勝).<sup>719</sup> As Takagi Kiyoko explains, the name was a mixture of the words "Emi", taking the characters from the phrase "virtuousness (美德, bitoku) that greatly invites blessings (恵み, megumi)", and "Oshikatsu" from the phrase "he who subjugated those who cause outrages, won (勝ち, kachi) against formidable enemies, and suppressed (押し静めた, oshishizumeta) disturbances."<sup>720</sup> He was also permitted to use personal seal and to mint coins, all of these honors not given to a single person since Nakamaro's grandfather Fuhito.

Surely the developments under the reign of the new emperor were regarded as a cause for concern by Retired Emperor Kôken. As if trying to counterbalance Nakamaro's rapid rise to power, she tried to directly intervene in the government by issuing an Imperial edict on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759). It read:

“勅曰。[···] 宜令百官五位已上。緇徒師位已上。悉書意見。密封奉表。直言正对。勿有隱諱。朕与宰相。審簡可否。[···]又勅曰。”

*[Let all hear the edict proclaimed by the Retired Emperor. [...] All officials with a rank five or higher at court and all Buddhist teachers should write their opinion [on the political matters in the state] without concealing a single thing. We will give it to the Prime Minister to read and assess. [...]]<sup>721</sup>*

As Takinami Sadako points out, suggestions of such public discussion could be traced back to the introduction of the Taika Reform, but the first time when it actually took place was in Yôrô 5 (721)

<sup>717</sup> See pp. 337

<sup>718</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (e): Shibichûdai

<sup>719</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 2.8.25

<sup>720</sup> Takagi 2018: 209

<sup>721</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 3.5.9

during the reign of Emperor Genshō.<sup>722</sup> That had been only a year after Fujiwara no Fuhito's death and the year in which Prince Nagaya began to slowly take hold on the government. In contrast to the dispute raised by Retired Emperor Kōken, however, that in 721 included only the Major Controllers of the Left and Right (左右大弁; sayūdaiben) and the ministers of the eight ministries. A discussion in which the opinion of the monks was asked could be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō 17 (745) when Emperor Shōmu, who came back to Heijō-kyō after his failure to erect a Great Buddha in Shiragaki, gathered the monks of the four big temples of the capital in Yakushiji Temple and asked them of their opinions on whether the capital should be relocated. Takinami argues that Kōken simply wanted to follow in the footsteps of her father and thus sought the stance of the Buddhist monks. Moreover, as it could be seen, she clearly said that she was the one who had given the Prime Minister, that is Nakamaro, the proclamation for reading and assessment. One could therefore suppose that the opinions of the monks would also have been discussed between Kōken and Nakamaro, despite the former being only a Retired sovereign. Even though many opinions were submitted, according to Takinami, a big part of them were compiled in accordance with the Chinese customs, which eventually resulted in a refusal of their implementation on the pretext that they did not correspond to the actual political situation in the state.<sup>723</sup>

However, considering the further political developments, the discussed matter was not the main purpose for the proclamation of the said edict. It seemed that the Retired Emperor used it in order to challenge the rising power of her cousin and the unwise decisions of her successor on the throne. After seeing Emperor Junnin's edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 3 (759), it seems that the challenge had been accepted. In it, the sitting sovereign honored his parents Prince Toneri and Tagima no Yamashiro. His adoptive father Fujiwara no Nakamaro was not forgotten as well – he was bestowed the honorary title “esteemed father-in-law” (尚舅, shōkyū), which basically put him in a position equal to that of Emperor Shōmu or Retired Emperor Kōken. Furthermore, Nakamaro's grandfather Fuhito was given 12 districts in the province Ōmi and he was bestowed the posthumous name Tankaikō (淡海公). Nakamaro's father Muchimaro was also rewarded posthumously with the title of Dajō-daijin.<sup>724</sup> The Imperial edict could be understood as Junnin striking back at Retired Emperor Kōken. Striking is the fact that the new sovereign chose to seek advice from Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi instead from his predecessor on the throne. It could be assumed that Junnin was aware of the Retired Emperor's dissatisfaction with his political decisions, and thus decided to simply inform her of them. The Empress Dowager's name and titles are mentioned so often in the edict that one could get the impression that the honors bestowed on Junnin's parents and the members of the Fujiwara family were sought after not by him but rather by Kōmyōshi. Moreover, the proclamation presented another controversial statement. The sentence “*We have also reflected on the fact that when Shōmu Tennō designated a Crown Prince, and at the time when We ascended to the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession, We wondered fearfully whether Our parents and siblings should be designated.*”<sup>725</sup> created the impression that Junnin had basically been the successor of Emperor Shōmu, thus completely denying the reign of Emperor Kōken. Considering Junnin's dependency on Fujiwara no Nakamaro, such a bold statement could be regarded as shocking. On the one hand, the sentence could be interpreted as a direct provocation toward Retired Emperor Kōken. As it was already discussed, the succession in the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line of the Imperial family ran in accordance with certain rules and

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<sup>722</sup> See Takinami 1998: 119

<sup>723</sup> See Takinami 1998: 120

<sup>724</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 3.6.16 【 S 2 5 】 ; Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 40/41

<sup>725</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 40/41

traditions, the purpose of which was to legitimize and justify Kusakabe's successors' claims to the throne. Among those traditions, the best-known one was connected with a sword which had apparently once belonged to the prince. After his death, the sword was given to Fujiwara no Fuhito who acted as his guardian and whom the responsibility was given to hand over the weapon to the next rightful successor of the throne. The act of handing over the sword could be interpreted as a ceremony of official approval of the next emperor. As a matter of fact, the relic was not handed down to any female sovereign (Kôken was not an exception), a sign that they were not recognized as equals to their male counterparts. From that point of view, Emperor Junnin's statement could be understood as a clear provocation toward the Retired Emperor. According to Takinami Sadako, however, there was another reason for Junnin's choice of words. Prince Ôi's father, Prince Toneri, had been a direct descendant of Emperor Tenmu and as such didn't have any direct relation to Emperor Shômu and the Kusakabe line of succession. Therefore, for Junnin, and surely for his mentor Fujiwara no Nakamaro, a justification for the former's claim on the throne was needed. A tie to Emperor Shômu, that is the Kusakabe line, was needed in order for him to seem like the recognized successor of the throne after Emperor Kôken. A falsification of the facts and his statement that he was a Crown Prince chosen by Emperor Shômu would have been sufficient for him to be accepted as the rightful ruler of the state. In ancient China only the legitimate son of the emperor held the right to be appointed Crown Prince. As Kôken did not have any children, the only other possibility was for Prince Ôi to have been connected by blood with her father Emperor Shômu. Although such a strategy seemed far-fetched, it was the only way for a person as knowledgeable in Chinese history as Fujiwara no Nakamaro to justify his protégé's claim to the throne.<sup>726</sup>

Considering the fact that the Empress Dowager's name was mentioned many times throughout the edict, it remains unclear why Kômmyôshi encouraged, or at least supported, such provocations toward her own daughter. A possible reason could have been the belief of Emperor Shômu's empress that her daughter had ascended the throne as a temporary solution to the succession issue. Therefore, she could have seen her own support of Junnin as the only way to follow the normal order of things. Another possibility is that Kômmyôshi's lineage took precedence in the matter. As a Fujiwara family member, the Empress Dowager was surely taught to support the clan head as much as she could. Considering Nakamaro's vast political influence, she could have accepted him as the Fujiwara family head even though he was the second son of Fujiwara no Muchimaro. Therefore, under these circumstances, it was absolutely possible for Kômmyôshi to have put her clan before her own daughter. Anyway, all things considered, it could be assumed that the proclamation was strongly influenced by Fujiwara no Nakamaro. For him, a political figure so powerful that he was able to put his protégé on the throne and retain his influence over him, the Retired Emperor was not simply a woman who had sat temporarily on the throne. As a member of her court during her reign, he could witness the way in which she resolved the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. Therefore, it could be assumed that it would have been in Nakamaro's best interest to suppress the Retired Emperor before she could gather sufficient support to challenge his hold on the sitting sovereign.

Interestingly enough, even though the edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759) was surely received, it remained more or less unanswered. On the contrary, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 4 (760), Retired Emperor Kôken bestowed the title of Daishi (or, Taishi) on Fujiwara no Nakamaro.

“【S 2 6】乾政官大臣(仁方)敢(天)仕奉(倍伎)人無時(波)空(久)置(弓)在官(爾阿利)。  
然今大保(方)必可仕奉(之止)所念坐(世)。多(能)遍重(天)勅(止毛)、敢(未之時止)為(弓)

<sup>726</sup> See Takinami 1998: 124

辞(備)申、(豆良久)可受賜物(奈利世波)祖父仕奉(天麻自)。然有物(乎)、知所(毛)無(久)、怯(久)劣(岐)押勝(我)得仕奉(倍岐)官(爾波)不在、恐(止)申。可久申(須乎)、皆人(仁之毛)辞(止)申(仁)依(弓)此官(乎婆)授不給(止)令知(流)事不得。又祖父大臣(乃)明(久)明(久)淨(岐)心以(弓)御世累(弓)天下申給(比)、朝廷助仕奉(利多夫)事(乎)、宇牟我自(弥)辱(弥)念行(弓)、挂(久毛)畏(岐)聖天皇朝、太政大臣(止之弓)仕奉(止)勅(部礼止)。数数辞(備)申(多夫仁)依(弓)受賜(多婆受)成(爾志)事(毛)悔(止)念(賀)故(仁)。今此藤原惠美朝臣(能)大保(乎)大師(乃)官(仁)上奉(止)授賜(夫)天皇御命衆聞食宣。即召大師賜隨身契。」<sup>727</sup>

*[The office of Great Minister of the Great Council of State is one which is left vacant when there is no specially qualified person to fill it. However, the present Daihō Oshikatsu has repeatedly been commanded to take it up, but has declined, saying:*

*'If there was anyone capable of taking the office, it was my grandfather Fuhito. However, I Oshikatsu am too weak and inferior to receive this office. I say this with fear and trembling.'*

*Since he has said this, We, as is known, have declared to all 'Since Oshikatsu has declined, there is no one else capable of receiving this office.' Now Our grandfather the Great Minister served with bright and pure heart in the reigns of several Sovereigns, offering up advice on matters of state, and his aid to the court was received gratefully. Then in the court of the Sagely Empress Genshō whose name is invoked with awe and fear she ordered him to serve as Great Minister of the Great Council of State. But he declined repeatedly and died without receiving this office, which was greatly regrettable. Now We appoint the Daihō Fujiwara Emi no Asomi to the office of Daishi. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>728</sup>*

Daishi, or Taishi, (大師) was the Chinese equivalent of Dajō-daijin during the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046 – 256 B.C.) and was introduced in Japan after the reform of the governmental system enacted by Emperor Junnin after the latter's ascension to the throne. In later times, the title was used in China mainly in relation to Buddhism ("taishi" could be translated as "great teacher/tutor") after it lost political credibility after the fall of the Zhou Dynasty in 256 B.C. Thus, after first having been appointed Taiho, the lowest of the top three civil positions of the Zhou Dynasty, one year later Nakamaro was given the highest civil rank possible.

At the same time, considering the development of the position after the fall of the Zhou Dynasty, Kōken's action could not be regarded as simply her wish to reward a courtier for his loyal service to the throne. During her years as sitting sovereign, Kōken herself had ample opportunities (for example, after the suppression of Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy) to introduce changes in the political system and to elevate Fujiwara no Nakamaro in rank but she didn't do so. It could therefore be assumed that the emperor had been satisfied with the existing political order and didn't see the need to change it. That statement could be supported by the fact that she returned everything to its previous state after the suppression of Nakamaro's rebellion and her reascension to the throne.<sup>729</sup> From that point of view, an edict in which she practically accepted and supported the new political system introduced by her successor on the throne was something unexpected. Moreover, it should not be

<sup>727</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 4.1.4

<sup>728</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 43

<sup>729</sup> See Bender 2021: 87

forgotten that her edict was proclaimed roughly six months after Emperor Junnin's bold *senmyô* in which he clearly provoked, or even insulted, her. As a matter of fact, it was considered a Retired Emperor's duty to support the sitting sovereign, at least in the first years of the latter's reign (such were the cases with Jitô and Monmu, Genshō and Shōmu, and eventually Shōmu and Kōken). Under normal circumstances, it could have been assumed that by appointing Nakamaro as Daishi (Taishi), Kōken wanted to ensure the stability of the government and thus to support Emperor Junnin's rule. But the suppression of Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy in 757 clearly showed that Kōken was not a person who easily forgot offenses. Therefore, the hypothesis that the Retired Emperor wanted to support the sitting sovereign seems implausible. After the offensive edict from the previous year, Kōken surely wanted to return the insult to both the emperor and his minister. From that point of view, it could be speculated that by appointing Nakamaro as Daishi (Taishi) the Retired Emperor followed the Buddhist interpretation of the title rather than its political connotations. Thus, Kōken indirectly said to Nakamaro that she didn't accept him as the most powerful person on the political scene in the same way in which he didn't accept her as the rightful descendant of Prince Kusakabe and successor of Emperor Shōmu. Although Buddhism played a big role in her life, Kōken wasn't so naïve to believe that religion was more important than politics in Nara Japan. Therefore, through her edict, she pointed out to Nakamaro that in her eyes he was an important figure in state, but he would never be the most significant person after the emperor as the title of Dajō-daijin suggested. Similar to the way in which she presented herself during the Tachibana no Naramaro conspiracy, Retired Emperor Kōken subtly responded to the challenge of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and showed him that she would not be suppressed so easily.

Anyway, while both parties showed their readiness to fight on the political scene, their plans had to be temporarily postponed. In the 4<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 4 (760), the Empress Dowager's health took turn for the worse. According to Shoku Nihongi, she refused food and sleep, and prayers were said in all five big temples in the capital. Eventually, nothing helped and Kōmyōshi took her last breath in the 6<sup>th</sup> month of 760.<sup>730</sup> It remains unclear how the death of her mother influenced Retired Emperor Kōken. After all, she was unmarried and her remaining relatives were the members of the Fujiwara family and her half sisters, the Imperial princesses Fuwa and Inoe. The political developments surely had strained her relationship with the Fujiwara, while she had never been close with Shōmu's daughters by Agatainukai no Hirotoji. In any case, the Empress Dowager's death tipped the balance of power at court. Nakamaro used the opportunity to strengthen his hold on the emperor and the government, thus effectively managing to isolate Retired Emperor Kōken. On the pretext that construction works were in progress on the grounds of the Imperial Palace at Heijō-kyō, Emperor Junnin decided to change residences and to go to Hora no Miya (a palace situated in the south of Lake Biwa in the vicinity of the Ishiyama-dera Temple) in 761.<sup>731</sup> Although the change was not stated as such, there are indications that the emperor's intentions were not simply to use the villa as his temporary residence but rather to make it his permanent capital. That much could be concluded from an earlier Shoku Nihongi record from the 11<sup>th</sup> day of 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 5 (761) in which the phrase "relocation of the capital" (遷都; *sento*) instead of "Imperial visit" (行幸; *gyōkō*) is used. Moreover, in the same record, it was stated that Junnin had given 1 000 000 rice bundles to Fujiwara no Nakamaro, as well as 100 000 bundles each to the Imperial Princes Fune and Ikeda.<sup>732</sup> The purpose of the gift supposedly was to compensate the minister and the princes for their expenses during the transfer period from one capital to another. At the same time, while it could be concluded that Emperor Junnin was firm in his resolve

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<sup>730</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 4.4.28 and 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 4.6.7

<sup>731</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 5.10.28

<sup>732</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 5.10.11

to change capitals, the reason for it remained unclear. It could have had something to do with Fujiwara no Nakamaro's intention to invade Silla and his need of a military base of operations.<sup>733</sup>

As a matter of fact, Retired Emperor Kōken also accompanied the sitting sovereign to Hora no miya<sup>734</sup>, but, as it could be seen from the future developments, the change of residences did not shorten the distance between the former and the current ruler. On the contrary, the decision that both Junnin and Kōken ought to stay at Hora no miya only sped up the inevitable clash between them. As one could see from Shoku Nihongi's chronicles from the 7<sup>th</sup> day of 4<sup>th</sup> month of Hōki 3 (772)<sup>735</sup>, it was during the Retired Emperor's stay at Hora no miya when she first encountered the Buddhist monk Dōkyō who helped her to recover from an unidentified illness. As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the contacts between them soon became a cause for concern for both Junnin and Fujiwara no Nakamaro. As the further developments showed, the sitting emperor and his Prime Minister had any reason to be worried. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 6 (762), Kōken decided to cut all ties with Emperor Junnin<sup>736</sup>, and several days later, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 6 (762), she delivered the coup de grace as she proclaimed an edict with which she practically took all power from the hands of the reigning sovereign and proclaimed her return to active Imperial duty.

“【S 2 7】太上天皇御命以(弓)卿等諸語(部止)宣(久)。朕御祖大皇后(乃)御命以(弓)朕(爾)告(之久)、岡宮御宇天皇(乃)日繼(波)、加久(弓)絕(奈牟止)為。女子(能)繼(爾波)在(止母)欲令嗣(止)宣(弓)、此政行給(岐)。加久為(弓)今帝(止)立(弓)須麻(比)久(流)間(爾)、宇夜宇也(自久)相從事(波)無(之弓)、斗卑等(乃)仇(能)在言(期等久)、不言(岐)辭(母)言(奴)。不為(岐)行(母)為(奴)。凡加久伊波(流倍枳)朕(爾波)不在。別宮(爾)御坐坐(牟)時、自加得言(也)。此(波)朕劣(爾)依(弓之)、加久言(良之止)念召(波)、愧(自弥)伊等保(自弥奈母)念(須)。又一(爾波)朕心發菩提心緣(爾)在(良之止母奈母)念(須)。是以、出家(弓)仏弟子(止)成(奴)。但政事(波)、常祀(利)小事(波)今帝行給(部)。國家大事賞罰二柄(波)朕行(牟)。加久(能)狀聞食悟(止)宣御命、衆聞食宣。」<sup>737</sup>

*[Let all nobles hearken to the words which are pronounced by the Retired Empress. According to the words of Our revered mother the Dowager Empress Kōmyō, what she announced to Us was that 'The line of imperial descendants of the Emperor who ruled the Realm at Oka no Miya, Prince Kusakabe, should remain unbroken. To avoid breaking this line you, even though a young woman, should succeed to Shōmu Tennō.'*

*Thus We undertook the government. Then We set up Junnin as the current Mikado. However, Junnin has not obeyed Us reverently. He has said things that should not have been said, like those of an outsider, and done things that should not have been done. He has spoken wrongfully in Our name. Perhaps he said these things since We were living in a separate palace. Perhaps it is due to Our foolishness that he has spoken, and We are ashamed and disgraced. Or perhaps it is due to Our karma that moved Our heart to Buddhist enlightenment so that We left the world and became a disciple of the Buddha. Now as for the government, the Mikado*

<sup>733</sup> Takinami 1998: 136

<sup>734</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 5.10.13

<sup>735</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝龜 [Hōki] 3.4.7

<sup>736</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 6.5.23

<sup>737</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 6.6.3

*will carry out the small duties of the usual ceremonies. We shall carry out the fundamental duties of the great things of state, rewards and punishments. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict and let all understand these things.]*<sup>738</sup>

This senmyô's structure is much different from Kôken's previous edicts. While most of the latter contained the so-called "flowery" opening sequences, the edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) conveyed the Retired Emperor's views on the current political situation without preamble. The proclamation could be interpreted as Kôken's answer to Junnin's edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759), or at least that much could be concluded after reading the sentences supposedly announced by her mother Empress Dowager Kômyôshi: "*The line of imperial descendants of the Emperor who ruled the Realm at Oka no Miya, Prince Kusakabe, should remain unbroken. To avoid breaking this line you, even though a young woman, should succeed to Shômu Tennô.*" According to Joan R. Piggott, it is highly likely that those words represented the Chinese ideal of patrilineal stem succession which was very hard, at times even impossible, to be realized at the Nara court.<sup>739</sup> The reason for those hardships laid in the lack of practice for concubines and the children born to them to be officially recognized as Imperial offspring, with Prince Asaka, Shômu's son by Agatainukai no Hirotoji, having been the latest example of that. At the same time, as history showed, it was eventually that traditional view within the Imperial House which brought Emperor Kôken on the throne. Unfortunately for her, Kôken, as any other female ruler before and even after her, was considered merely a "throneholder", someone with an Imperial blood coursing through her veins who would keep the throne for potential male successors. Namely that view eventually became the reason for the political unrest during her reign which reached its culmination with the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro from 757. Even after Kôken's abdication in 758, an event which most likely took place without her firm willingness to do so, her authority was constantly challenged and her political prowess was questioned.<sup>740</sup> The clearest example of that, Emperor Junnin's edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759), made it clear that even Kôken's mother Kômyôshi had apparently regarded her daughter as a throneholder, a fact which most likely delivered severe blows to the latter's self-confidence. After the Empress Dowager's death, both Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Junnin tried to suppress the Retired Emperor as much as possible. The decision that she was to accompany the emperor to Hora no miya had most likely something to do with it. From that point of view, Kôken's illness from 761, which was eventually healed by Dôkyô, could be attributed to psychological rather than to physiological issues. As it was already discussed, the Buddhist monk's area of expertise had little to do with medicine or healing methods. It was much more esoterically-oriented. Among other things, he specialized in Chinese horoscopes and the ways in which one could see the future. Interestingly enough, Kôken's illness was healed by a person who hardly possessed any medicinal knowledge. It could therefore be concluded that Dôkyô's "healing" techniques were directed toward improvement of the Retired Emperor's self-confidence. Not long thereafter, the edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) was proclaimed.

In it, there are no indications of Kôken's weakened will which was clearly evident in her abdication edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 2 (758). The words "*The line of imperial descendants of [...] Prince Kusakabe, should remain unbroken.*" could be interpreted as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the current sovereign, who, albeit Tenmu's descendant, was not related by blood to Prince Kusakabe. In that context, the words "*even though a young woman*", could be understood as a rebuttal of Junnin's

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<sup>738</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 44

<sup>739</sup> See Piggott 2003: 52

<sup>740</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 3.6.16 【 S 2 5 】 /Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 40/41



indirect claim that he had been Shōmu's direct descendant. By emphasizing the fact that she was a woman but nonetheless ascended the throne in order to prevent the Kusakabe line from extinction, Kōken reminded the sitting sovereign that even a woman with blood ties to Prince Kusakabe had more claim to the throne than him who was merely Emperor Tenmu's descendant. By claiming Kōmyōshi's name as the one who expressed that view, Kōken also reversed Junnin's words that he was supported by the Empress Dowager. The Retired Emperor created the impression that regardless of the accepted views and traditions, in Kōmyōshi's eyes the continuation of the Kusakabe line took precedence over the gender of the person sitting on the throne.

In the second paragraph of the edict, Kōken referred to Junnin as "*mikado*", thus continuing the tendency from the Shoku Nihongi's chronicles discussed in the previous chapter. It once more showed the strained relationship between the sitting sovereign and the Retired Emperor, as well as her disregard for him. But, as the edict continues, it becomes clear that the lack of respect was actually the result of Junnin's own actions. In that train of thought, the sentences "*He has said things that should not have been said, like those of an outsider, and done things that should not have been done. He has spoken wrongfully in Our name.*" should be discussed in detail. Here, one should probably go back to the Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 8 (764) that narrated Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion. As it was already discussed, the explanation that Dōkyō "*simply waited on Emperor Takano*" was most likely needed due to the deliberate spreading of rumors about the nature of the relationship between Retired Emperor Kōken and the Buddhist monk. In that context, the sentences from the second paragraph of the current edict sound like a direct accusation against Emperor Junnin, as it was apparently him who supported the said rumors. Interesting is also the statement that Junnin had "*done things that should not have been done*". These words could be a reference to the sitting emperor's edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 3 (759) in which he offended her and deliberately created the impression that he had been a direct successor of Emperor Shōmu. They could also be a reference to Junnin's dependency on Fujiwara no Nakamaro, as well as the sovereign's constant lavishing of honors and titles on the minister.

Then, the sentence "*Or perhaps it is due to Our karma that moved Our heart to Buddhist enlightenment so that We left the world and became a disciple of the Buddha.*" is very important, as it indicates that Retired Emperor Kōken had shaved her head, thus becoming a Buddhist nun. It could be assumed that the event took place after Kōken cut all ties with Junnin. According to Shoku Nihongi's chronicle from the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 6 (762), after the rift between the two rulers became clear, the Retired Emperor "*stayed at Hokkeji Temple.*"<sup>741</sup> It was probably around that time when she shaved her head. That piece of information could give a new light to the phrase "*has said things that should not have been said*". By possibly insinuating a love relationship between the Retired Emperor and Dōkyō, Junnin not only offended Kōken on a personal level but also neglected her Buddhist vows, that is her religious faith. From that point of view, it is no wonder that the Imperial edict ends with the decision: "*Now as for the government, the Mikado will carry out the small duties of the usual ceremonies. We shall carry out the fundamental duties of the great things of state, rewards and punishments.*" By taking over all of Junnin's prerogatives, Kōken practically, albeit not officially, unseated him. This could be considered the Retired Emperor's first step toward her return on the throne.

According to Takinami Sadako, Kōken was so attached to Emperor Shōmu's guidance that, despite him being dead for a long time, she was still willing to follow his wishes.<sup>742</sup> Considering the events which

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<sup>741</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 6.5.23

<sup>742</sup> Takinami 1998: 141

took place during her first reign, it could be argued that she had been unfilial once, as she deposed the Crown Prince chosen by her father in his last will. Even then, however, Kōken pointed out Funado's lack of respect for the deceased emperor as the main cause of his deposition, thus managing to maintain the image of a filial daughter. In that train of thought, it could be assumed that the current political situation in which an emperor not directly related to the Kusakabe line sat on the throne went against Emperor Shōmu's final will. As a matter of fact, the succession issue and the continuation of the Kusakabe line, in particular, were the main cause for concern during Emperor Shōmu's reign. At the same time, however, the sovereign struggled under the need to support his family, the Fujiwara clan. Therefore, after the death of Prince Motoi, his son by Empress Kōmyōshi, his only hope remained Imperial Princess Abe, the future Emperor Kōken. She was the only child of his who had both Kusakabe and Fujiwara blood coursing through her veins. Therefore, in his last will, Shōmu expressed the opinion that Crown Prince Abe was the successor chosen by him who ought to be respected as such. Considering the political development of the relationship between Kōken and the head of the Fujiwara family, it could be argued whether the Retired Emperor wanted to continue maintaining the Fujiwara's blood connection with the throne. At the same time, however, Kōken surely wanted to protect her image as a filial daughter who followed her father's will. In that sense, the situation with Emperor Junnin, Prince Toneri's son and a descendant of Emperor Tenmu but not of Prince Kusakabe, could be considered a betrayal of Emperor Shōmu's biggest wish.

In a perspective, Retired Emperor Kōken probably regarded the current situation between her and Emperor Junnin as similar to that between her and her father Emperor Shōmu. As a matter of fact, the Kusakabe line within the Imperial House showed the tendency to allow the Retired Emperor to exert significant influence on the political scene and the sitting sovereign, in particular. After all, Emperor Jitō had functioned as an adviser to Emperor Monmu. Later on, the tendency was continued by Retired Emperor Genshō who gave advice to Emperor Shōmu. Eventually, Retired Emperor Shōmu served his daughter in the same capacity. Reading the description of the Insei system (a system in which state decisions were made by the abdicated sovereign) given by G. Cameron Hurst III in his essay on the matter<sup>743</sup>, it seems that the beginning of the political system which dominated the Japanese Imperial court during the Heian period (1086 – 1185) was actually set at the end of the Nara period by the Kusakabe line within the Imperial House. However, Emperor Junnin seemed to have deviated from the traditional order of things. He attempted to oppose Kōken's decisions, disrespected her and sided with his Prime Minister, and eventually even tried to control her private affairs. Even if Kōken had not been a filial daughter who obeyed her father's wishes, the sole fact that the sitting sovereign didn't seem to follow the established order of things was reason enough for his disempowerment. The continuation of the normal functioning of the government after the proclamation of Retired Emperor Kōken's edict could be seen as a sign that the courtiers accepted the division of Imperial authority as normal. According to Shoku Nihongi's chronicles from the 12<sup>th</sup> month of 762, it seemed that even Junnin's most powerful supporter Fujiwara no Nakamaro had no interest in opposing that order of things. At the time, three of his sons were appointed as *sangi*, or associate counsellors, while Nakamaro himself continued to prepare for a war with Silla.<sup>744</sup>

Retired Emperor Kōken's next steps, however, seemed to have been directed at Fujiwara no Nakamaro rather than Emperor Junnin. That much could be assumed from her edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 7 (763) in which another one of Nakamaro's protégés, the monk Jikun, was dismissed from his position as head of Yamashinaji Temple.

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<sup>743</sup> See Hurst (a) 1988: 64/65

<sup>744</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyō hōji] 6.12

“遣使於山階寺。宣詔曰。少僧都慈訓法師。行政乖理。不堪為綱。宜停其任。依衆所議。以道鏡法師為少僧都。”

*[A messenger was dispatched to Yamashinaji Temple to convey the Imperial edict: Due to Shôsôzu Jikun's unreasonable performance of ceremonies and the lack of support from the clergy, he is to be dismissed from his position. After multiple meetings on the matter, it was decided that he will be replaced with the monk Dôkyô.]*<sup>745</sup>

With this move, the Retired Emperor exerted her newly acquired authority and emphasized her words that she would “carry out the fundamental duties of the great things of state, rewards and punishments.” At the same time, the edict could be regarded as a direct challenge to Fujiwara no Nakamaro, as the Prime Minister had actually been Jikun’s patron.

Interestingly enough, there were no signs of any movements from Nakamaro’s side until the end of the year. All changed, however, in the next Tenpyô hôji 8 (764). According to Shoku Nihongi’s chronicle from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, Nakamaro was appointed as totoku (都督, governor-general) of the Shikinaï (四畿内, four provinces close to the capital), military chief of the provinces Ômi, Tamba, Harima, as well as sangen (三関).<sup>746</sup> The holder of the last position was responsible for the tax collection and border control of the key points leading to the capital. His importance grew during times of political and social unrest, for example, when there was change of the emperor. The said key points were always equipped with the best weapons and held the most military reinforcements due to their importance for the security of the capital. Therefore, it could be said that through that position, Nakamaro became the biggest military force in the central region of the state. Of course, such big appointment could not go through without the permission and the blessing of the emperor, at the time, Retired Emperor Kôken who attended to important state affairs. It goes without saying that both she and Nakamaro knew that this assignment meant ultimate military power for the Prime Minister. At an earlier stage, such possibility would not have been so bad, but after Jikun’s dismissal and the disempowerment of Emperor Junnin with the edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of 762, Kôken was openly considered Nakamaro’s political enemy. In that train of thought, one could question the practicality of the Retired Emperor’s approval of the Prime Minister’s appointment. On the one hand, it could be speculated that she was provoking Nakamaro to act by leaving herself defenceless against him. On the other hand, Kôken knew that her cousin was a proficient strategist and politician. From that point of view, it could have been assumed that he would not be the first to act. It could be speculated that as long as the minister wasn’t further provoked, he would serve the state faithfully.

However, contrary to all expectations and despite the Prime Minister’s political experience and tactical mindset, he decided to make the best of his military forces. According to the Imperial edict from the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764), Nakamaro intended to rebel against Kôken but his plan was exposed, thus leaving the Retired Emperor no other choice than to take actions against him.

勅曰。太師正一位藤原惠美朝臣押勝并子孫。起兵作逆。仍解免官位。并除藤原姓字已畢。其職分・功封等雜物。宜悉収之。即遣使、固守三関。」[…] 是夜。押勝走近江。官軍追討。

<sup>745</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 7.9.4

<sup>746</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.2

*[Let all hear the Imperial Edict:*

*“Taishi Senior 1<sup>st</sup> rank Fujiwara Emi Ason Oshikatsu and his descendants raised an army and planned to rebel. Consequently, he will be dismissed from his rank and the Fujiwara family name will be erased. Moreover, he will be stripped of all his positions and all his merits will be denounced. Let Imperial messengers be dispatched to all roads to the capital and the bells be rung!” [...] That night, Oshikatsu fled to Ômi. The Imperial army followed him.]<sup>747</sup>*

On the next day, the 12<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, the Retired Emperor proclaimed another edict in which she rewarded those faithful retainers who turned against Nakamaro. Among other things, one reads also the following words:

“高野天皇勅。今聞。逆臣惠美仲麻呂。盜取官印逃去者。[···] 又北陸道諸国、不須承用太政官印。”

*[Let all hear the edict of Emperor Takano. The rebel Emi Nakamaro stole the Imperial Seal and fled with his people. [...] He fled to various provinces via the Hokuriku Road. The rebels ought not to use the Imperial Seal.]<sup>748</sup>*

This second edict clears out any misunderstanding that could have occurred after reading the first proclamation from the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month. Fujiwara no Nakamaro seemed to have been successful in his second attempt to obtain the objects needed to exercise Imperial power. By having the Imperial Seal in their possession, the rebels had an important leverage in their hands which they could have used not only to negotiate in case of failure but also to potentially try to enthrone a new ruler. The Shoku Nihongi chronicles in regard to the rebellion eventually revealed the intention of the rebels to proclaim Prince Shioyaki the new emperor.<sup>749</sup>

Retired Emperor Kôken’s next edict was issued shortly after the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s rebellion and the latter’s decapitation. In the first part of it, she gave short summary of the uprising and condemned the former Prime Minister. More interesting, however, is the second part of the senmyô which reads:

“【S 2 8】[···] 然之(我)奏(之久)、此禪師(乃)昼夜朝庭(乎)護仕奉(乎)見(流仁)、先祖(之)大臣(止之天)仕奉(之)位名(乎)繼(止)念(天)在人(奈利止)云(天)退賜(止)奏(之)可止毛)、此禪師(乃)行(乎)見(爾)至(天)淨(久)。仏(乃)御法(乎)繼隆(武止)念行(末之)朕(乎)毛)導護(末須)己師(乎)夜)多夜須(久)退(末都良武止)念(天)在(都)。然朕(方)髮(乎)曾利(天)仏(乃)御袈裟(乎)服(天)在(止毛)、国家(乃)政(乎)不行(阿流已止)不得。仏(毛)經(仁)勅(久)、国王(伊)、王位(仁)坐時(方)菩薩(乃)淨戒(乎)受(与止)勅(天)在。此(仁)依(天)念(倍方)出家(天毛)政(乎)行(仁)豈障(倍岐)物(仁)方)不在。故是以(天)、帝(乃)出家(之天)伊未(須)世(仁方)、出家(之天)在大臣(毛)在(倍之止)念(天)樂(末須)位(仁方)阿良禰(止毛)此道鏡禪師(乎)大臣禪師(止)位(方)授(末都流)事(乎)諸聞食(止)宣。」復勅(久)、天下(乃)人誰(曾)君(乃)臣(仁)不在(安良武)。心淨(久之天)仕奉(良武)、此(之)実(能)朕臣(

<sup>747</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.11

<sup>748</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.12

<sup>749</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.18

仁方)在(武)。夫人(止之天)己(我)先祖(乃)名(乎)興繼比呂(米武止)不念(阿流方)不在。是以(天)明(久)淨(岐)心以(天)仕奉(乎方)氏氏門(方)絶(多末方須)治賜(止)勅御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)勅。又宣(久)。仕奉狀(爾)隨(天)冠位阿氣賜治賜(久止)宣。」又勅。<sup>750</sup>

*[...] Now, in his words to us, Nakamaro said 'Observing that this meditation monk Dôkyô night and day seeks to serve and protect the throne, I believe his intention is to succeed to the name and rank of some fictitious ancestral Great Minister.' He advised Us to rid Ourselves of him. However, observing Our monk's conduct, he is pure. He seeks to transmit and extend the Buddhist law, and guides and protects Us. How could We think of removing him?*

*Now although We have shaven Our hair and wear Buddhist robes, We are yet able to carry out the government of the state. As the Buddha and scriptures command: 'Kings, when you take the rule of the nation, receive the pure ordination of the Bodhisattva.' Thus how can there be any harm in still conducting the affairs of state, although We have renounced the world? So in a situation where the sovereign has left the world, she may also have a minister who has done likewise. Although he has not asked it for himself, We appoint the meditation monk Dôkyô as Great Minister and Meditation Monk. Let all hear and understand.*

*Further we decree that in the realm there is no one who is not subject to the sovereign. Those who serve with pure hearts are truly Our subjects. There is none who does not inherit his family name from his ancestor and seek to further it. If one serves with a bright and pure heart then their house will not perish. Let all hear and understand these words that the Empress proclaims as an edict. We further decree that by loyally serving the sovereign that one may achieve advancement in rank.]<sup>751</sup>*

According to the Retired Emperor's words, Fujiwara no Nakamaro regarded Dôkyô as a potential political rival and wanted to get rid of him. However, Kôken decided to keep the monk by her side, as she saw him only as a loyal servant. While the senmyô is somewhat neutral on the matter, it could be assumed that Nakamaro's negative sentiments toward Dôkyô were caused by the monk's close relationship with the Retired Emperor. That same opinion is expressed in the original Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) in which it could be read that, "At that time, Dôkyô simply waited on [Emperor Takano] by staying by her side, and thus received her favor. Oshikatsu was so affected by it that he became restless and let his feelings be known to Emperor Takano." Now, one could only speculate about the reason for Nakamaro's restlessness. Even though Kôken was a Retired Emperor with a significant political authority, she was only a former sovereign, after all. At the same time, the Prime Minister had been the favorite of the sitting ruler Emperor Junnin. From a political point of view, Kôken's association with the monk should not have been a cause for concern. Obviously, such had not been the case. It could be assumed that Fujiwara no Nakamaro acknowledged the Retired Emperor's potential and regarded her as a formidable rival. From that point of view, it is understandable that he wanted to have her isolated and without support. Thus, she would not have had the confidence to act against him. Ironically, however, it was namely Dôkyô's support in the form of his "healing methods" which caused the clash between Retired Emperor Kôken and her cousin Fujiwara no Nakamaro, and it was the latter who was on the losing side.

The next paragraph clarifies Kôken's intention to take the reins of the government completely in her hands, although she had "shaven [her] hair and [wore] Buddhist robes". She defended her decision by

<sup>750</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.12

<sup>751</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 46

citing the Buddhist scriptures who taught that only a king who had received the “*pure ordination of the Bodhisattva*” could rule the nation with fairness. To further emphasize that view, she appointed Dôkyô to the position of Daijin-zenshi (大臣禪師) which could be translated as “monk minister”. “Zenshi” was also the word with which one described monks who were respected by the Imperial court. Interestingly enough, it is noted that “*he has not asked it for himself*”. Thus, with her first edict after the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s rebellion, Kôken revealed the direction of her future politics. She strived to create a government with her in the center, as “*there is no one who is not subject to the sovereign*”, while she used a seemingly loyal person as her political shield in a way similar to Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s function during her first reign. If one compares Emperor Junnin’s edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759), in which he honored Fujiwara no Nakamaro, to Kôken’s Imperial edict from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 764, one can find many similarities. Nakamaro was referred to as “father” and his children were given court rank. Dôkyô was called “pure” and was rewarded with the position of “monk minister”. In both cases, the persons honored thus became powerful political figures in the country later on. The difference was that while Emperor Junnin had been used by Nakamaro as the latter’s shield, Kôken wanted to create a situation in which she stood in the center while her minister had the duty to protect her from harm.

Then, after establishing her position as a winner in the political dispute, Kôken turned her eyes to the people who were related to and supported the traitor and, of course, the first person who experienced her retribution was Emperor Junnin. On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764), the Retired Emperor proclaimed an Imperial edict in which she decided his fate.

“【S 2 9】挂(末久毛)畏朕(我)天先帝(乃)御命以(天)朕(仁)勅(之久)、天下(方)朕子伊末之(仁)授給。事(乎之)云(方)、王(乎)奴(止)成(止毛)、奴(乎)王(止)云(止毛)、汝(乃)為(牟末仁末爾)。假令後(仁)帝(止)立(天)在人(伊)、立(乃)後(爾)汝(乃)多米仁無礼(之)亘不從奈壳(久)在(牟)人(乎方)帝(乃)位(仁)置(許止方)不得。又君臣(乃)理(仁)從(天)、貞(久)淨(岐)心(乎)以(天)助奉侍(牟之)帝(止)在(己止方)得(止)勅(岐)。可久在御命(乎)朕又一二(乃)豎子等(止)侍(天)聞食(天)在。然今帝(止之天)侍人(乎)此年己呂見(仁)其位(仁毛)不堪。是(乃)味仁不在。今聞(仁)、仲麻呂(止)同心(之天)窃朕(乎)掃(止)謀(家利)。又窃六千(乃)兵(乎)発(之)等等乃(比)、又七人(乃)味(之天)関(仁)入(牟止毛)謀(家利)。精兵(乎之天)押(之非天)壞乱(天)、罰滅(止)云(家利)。故是以、帝位(乎方)退賜(天)、親王(乃)位賜(天)淡路国(乃)公(止)退賜(止)勅御命(乎)聞食(止)宣。事畢。將公及其母。到小子門。庸道路鞍馬騎之。右兵衛督藤原朝臣藏下麻呂。衛送配所。幽于一院。勅曰。以淡路国賜大炊親王。国内所有官物調庸等類。任其所用。但出拳官稻、一依常例。」<sup>752</sup>又詔曰。”<sup>752</sup>

*[The words of the former Emperor Shōmu, whose name is invoked with awe and fear, were given to me, saying, ‘We bestow on you, Our child, all under heaven. This is to say that you have the power to make princes slaves, and slaves princes. And supposing there is one who comes after you, even if they be Mikado, if they disrespect you and are disobedient and rude, they shall not remain on the throne. The former Emperor said that it is the kind of person who follows the proper order of ruler and subject, has a correct and pure heart, and will give you aid, that*

<sup>752</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.10.9

*you may appoint to be the Mikado.’ These are the words We received from him before the throne with several young attendants.*

*As We have observed the person Junnin who has acted as the Mikado for the last several years, we see that he is not equal to the task. That is not all. We have now heard that he was in league with Nakamaro secretly seeking Our overthrow. Also he covertly sought to raise six thousand troops and to send soldiers to enter the passes. Further he plotted that he would push Us aside with his best troops, cause confusion and rebellion, committing the crime of destroying Our reign.*

*Thus we command that Junnin be stripped of the title of Mikado, and with the title of Imperial Prince be sent to Awaji Province as an official. Let all hear the words of this edict.]<sup>753</sup>*

The first part of the said decree refers to Emperor Shōmu’s last will cited in the Imperial edict from the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) in which he instructed the ministers to serve his daughter loyally and to guide and support her, but also taught his daughter, the future Emperor Kōken, that,

“[...]’As for the imperial throne, if it is conferred on someone whom Heaven has not ordained, that person will not be able to keep it. Rather it will cause that person to perish. Even though you may say ‘This is the person whom We have established’, yet if you come to know in your heart and see with your eye that that person is not competent, then follow your heart and replace that person. Thus he decreed.’”<sup>754</sup>

In the current situation, Kōken used her father’s words as the pretext for the forced abdication of the sitting sovereign. If one compares the deposition of Crown Prince Funado to the dethronement of Emperor Junnin, there are surely similarities to be found in the two cases. In the first one, Funado was deposed on accusations that he had behaved disrespectfully during the mourning period for Emperor Shōmu. Junnin’s abdication was forced on the pretext that Kōken followed her father’s guidance in the matter of choosing a successor. In both cases, Emperor Shōmu, or to be precise, his will was used as a “shield” for his daughter’s political decision. On the other hand, however, the two cases were very different from a political point of view. After all, it was one thing to depose a Crown Prince if one was still an emperor, but it was something completely different to force the sitting emperor to abdicate if one was only a Retired sovereign. The decision to initiate the second step while in a seemingly unfavorable position only showed Kōken’s confidence in her own ability as a politician and a ruler capable of winning the public opinion for her cause.

Then, several words could be said about the opening sentence of the second paragraph: “*As We have observed the person Junnin who has acted as the Mikado for the last several years, we see that he is not equal to the task.*” In the first place, the phrase “*We have observed [...] for the last several years*” is one which raises questions. Why did Kōken have to observe Junnin for so many years (Junnin’s reign lasted from 758 to 764, that is almost six years) to finally make the decision that he must be dethroned? She needed only several months to decide on the deposition of Crown Prince Funado and, what is more, at the time she had been much more inexperienced in the political games at court. Still, as unpractised as she had been in 757, she decided on Funado’s deposition without a second thought. If Kōken needed so much time to realize that Junnin was “*not equal to the task*” of ruling the country, one starts to wonder if his lack of governing abilities was actually the real reason for his forced abdication. As sharp as Kōken was, it would be hard to believe that she didn’t saw Junnin’s cons shortly

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<sup>753</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 47

<sup>754</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 70

after his enthronement in 758. After all, his edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 3 (759) was clear evidence of the new emperor's dependency on Fujiwara no Nakamaro, a flaw which could have had catastrophic consequences for the state. It seems reasonable to assume that Junnin's lack of political acumen would have been reason enough for Kôken to dethrone him much earlier than 764. As that had not been the case, however, it seems much more likely that his forced abdication had anything to do with Junnin's continuous support of Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Another interesting peculiarity is the usage of the word "acted" in reference to Junnin's reign. Thus, the impression is created that he had never really been the actual sovereign and only had acted as such. In fact, as Junnin had been strongly influenced by Fujiwara no Nakamaro throughout his reign, the word choice is not far from the truth. Moreover, the edict reveals that the emperor's support of Nakamaro was so strong that he wanted to raise troops against Kôken during the Prime Minister's rebellion. Junnin having been incapable to assess the danger of supporting a rebellion against a member of the Imperial family, a Retired Emperor by that, could be considered another evidence of his unworthiness to sit on the Imperial throne. Based on those accusations, Kôken didn't have another choice than to force him to abdicate, and to send him into exile in the province Awaji. Following the proclamation of the senmyô, she reascended the throne, thus becoming the last female ruler of Nara Japan and only the second emperor to be enthroned for the second time after Emperor Kôgyoku/Saimei (r. 642 – 645; 655 – 661).

After officially assuming the Imperial position, the new ruler immediately issued orders for the punishment of members of the Imperial family who had been involved in Nakamaro's plot. According to the proclamation directly following the senmyô about Junnin's dethronement, the Imperial Princes Fune and Ikeda were also sent into exile.

“【S 3 0】船親王(波)九月五日(爾)仲麻呂(止)二人謀(家良久)、書作(弓)朝庭(乃)咎計(弓)將進(等)謀(家利)。又仲麻呂(何)家物計(夫流爾)書中(爾)仲麻呂(等)通(家流)謀(乃)文有。是以親王(乃)名(波)下(弓)諸王(等)成(弓)隱岐国(爾)流賜(布)。又池田親王(波)此夏馬多集(天)事謀(止)所聞(支)。如是在事阿麻多太比所奏。是以親王(乃)名(波)下賜(天)諸王(等)志(弓)土左国(爾)流賜(布)等詔大命(乎)聞食(止)宣。」<sup>755</sup>

*[On the fifth day of the ninth month Imperial Prince Fune conspired with Nakamaro: 'Let us fabricate documents citing the misdeeds of the court of the Retired Empress, and present this report to the throne.' When Nakamaro's mansion was searched, various documents were found, among them correspondence showing that Imperial Prince Fune had conspired with Nakamaro. For this reason We strip him of the title of Imperial Prince, reduce him to the status of ordinary prince, and exile him to Oki Province. Also we have heard that this summer Imperial Prince Ikeda assembled numerous horses and plotted treason. This has been reported to us from several sources. Therefore We strip him of his title of Imperial Prince, reduce him to the status of ordinary prince, and exile him to Tosa Province. Let all hear the words of this edict.]<sup>756</sup>*

The second proclamation after Emperor Shôtoku's official takeover of the Imperial position indicated that during her second reign she would not necessarily maintain the image of a merciful and benevolent ruler. By sending the dethroned emperor and two Imperial Princes into exile, she showed that she would rule with an iron hand.

<sup>755</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.10.9

<sup>756</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 48



The same determination could be seen in her next edict dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764). According to it, the emperor was unwilling to appoint a Crown Prince and would not let herself be forced or persuaded to choose one if she was not sure of his capabilities.

“【S 3 1】諸奉侍上中下(乃)人等(乃)念(良末久)。国(乃)鎮(止方)皇太子(乎)置定(天之)心(毛)安(久)於多比(仁)在(止)、常人(乃)念云所(仁)在。然今(乃)間此太子(乎)定不賜在故(方)、人(乃)能(家武止)念(天)定(流毛)必能(之毛)不在。天(乃)不授所(乎)得(天)在人(方)、受(天毛)全(久)坐物(仁毛)不在、後(仁)壞。故是以(天)念(方)、人(乃)授(流爾)依(毛)不得。力(乎)以(天)競(倍伎)物(仁毛)不在。猶天(乃)由流(之天)授(倍伎)人(方)在(良牟止)念(天)定不賜(奴仁己曾阿礼)。此天津日嗣位(乎)朕一(利)貪(天)後(乃)繼(乎)不定(止仁方)不在。今(之紀乃)間(方)念見定(牟仁)天(乃)授賜(方牟)所(方)漸漸現(奈武止)念(天奈毛)定不賜勅御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)勅。」復勅(久)。人人己比岐比岐此人(乎)立(天)我功成(止)念(天)君位(乎)謀、窃(仁)心(乎)通(天)人(乎)伊佐奈(比)須須(牟己止)莫。己(可衣之)不成事(乎)謀(止曾)先祖(乃)門(毛)滅繼(毛)絶。自今以後(仁方)明(仁)貞(岐)心(乎)以(天)可仁可久(仁止)念(佐末多久)事奈(久之天)教賜(乃末仁末)奉侍(止)勅御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)勅。」<sup>757</sup>

*[Many persons upper, middle, and lower who serve the court think that ‘Appointing a Crown Prince will lead to stability in people’s hearts and calm the state.’ This is generally believed. Now with regard to the reason why We have not designated a Crown Prince for some time: even though persons wish to designate a candidate believing him to be competent does not mean that he will necessarily be competent. A person who has not been chosen by Heaven, even if he receives the title Crown Prince, may not necessarily be stable and suited for the duties, and may afterward be ruined. Thus when I reflect on the matter, conferring the title does not mean that people will acquiesce in the choice. Nor will designating a successor prevent people from forcibly contending the issue. Hence We shall not appoint a successor for the time being, trusting that Heaven will appoint someone in good time. It is not that, coveting for Ourselves alone the Heavenly Sun Succession, We do not designate a successor for the present interval. Rather it is that We trust that in this matter of designating a Crown Prince, the one on whom Heaven will confer the title will gradually come to be revealed. We command that all hear the words of this pronouncement.*

*Further, the people should not plot to set up a candidate for Crown Prince, thinking that by establishing one they will achieve merit for themselves. They shall not conspire by thinking to name one secretly in their hearts. By plotting something they themselves cannot bring to pass, the gates of their ancestral houses will perish, and their own succession be cut off. From now on let all serve clearly with correct hearts, without quarrelsome thoughts, according to the way We have taught. We command that all hear the words of this edict.]<sup>758</sup>*

In that edict, Shôtoku once more followed her father’s advice in regard to the appointment of a successor. She emphasized her determination to choose a Crown Prince only when the Heavens showed their support for the candidate. This time, the emperor didn’t want to repeat the mistake with

<sup>757</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.10.14

<sup>758</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 49/50

Prince Ôi. At the same time, Emperor Shôtoku criticized the courtiers and members of the Imperial family who pressured her into making a decision. She pointed out that their wish for the appointment of a Crown Prince was not out of respect for her or out of care about the state's future, but rather due to their own greed and hunger for power, thus showing them that she would not easily be influenced or deceived. Obviously, the third edict after Emperor Shôtoku's return to power only continued the tendency seen in her previous two proclamations – that she didn't want to play the benevolent ruler anymore. She would rather be seen as a harsh and uncompromising sovereign than play the role of a mild and naïve ruler, and eventually become a puppet in the hands of a powerful courtier like her predecessor had been.

According to Shoku Nihongi, the official enthronement of Emperor Shôtoku took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the new proclaimed Tenpyô jingo 1 (765). Typically, the era name (年号; nengô) was changed to celebrate an important event or a good omen. In many cases, the nengô was changed in the middle of the calendar year, with one year thus being in two different eras. Ross Bender explains the principles of the era name changes by using an example from the reign of Kôken/Shôtoku's father Emperor Shômu.

“Shômu Tennô ascended the throne in the year 724, upon which the nengô was changed from Yôrô to Jinki, due to the presentation of an auspicious white tortoise to the court. In 729 the nengô was changed again, to Tenpyô (Heavenly Peace). The occasion was another auspicious tortoise omen, this time a large white tortoise with the characters Tenô kihei chihakunen (天王貴平知百年) miraculously inscribed into its carapace. In 754 [...] The discovery of gold in the far northeastern province of Michinooku (Mutsu) was taken as another auspicious omen. It allowed the Rushana statue to be gilded, and in the fourth month Shômu, his Empress Kômyô, and the Crown Princess Abe no Naishinnô made an imperial progress to the Tôdaiji, where Shômu declared himself the “slave of the Three Treasures.” That month the nengô was changed to Tenpyô Kanpô 1 – The ‘hō’ symbolized not only the earthly treasure of gold, but the treasure of the Buddhist dharma. Then in the seventh month Shômu abdicated in favor of his daughter, who took the throne as Kôken Tennô. Upon her accession the nengô changed once again, to Tenpyô Shôhō 1.”<sup>759</sup>

According to the short narrative, it could be assumed that the era name was always changed after the ascension of a new emperor. Interestingly enough, however, that had not been the case with Emperor Junnin. Throughout his reign, the era name was not changed and remained Tenpyô hôji. That era had begun in 757, that is before Emperor Kôken's abdication, and ended in 765, on the day when Emperor Shôtoku was enthroned (Kôken's reascension). Then, the new sovereign changed the era name to Tenpyô jingo. Thus, the reign of Emperor Junnin remained a part of an era introduced by his predecessor on the throne. It remains unclear why the nengô was not changed upon Junnin's enthronement, but the situation was certainly untypical. Intentionally or not, the impression was created that he had been an unordinary ruler who didn't have the will, or even the authority, to change the era name. In any case, the end result was that if one observed only the era names without reading the chronicles of every single emperor of Japan, one would not even notice that there had been another ruler between the two reigns of the female sovereign who remained in history as Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Anyway, the newly chosen name “Tenpyô jingo” (天平神護) meant “Heaven's peace and godly protection”, which indicated that the emperor saw herself as a ruler protected by the gods, as one chosen to spread Heavens' peace across the land. As Ross Bender points out, Kôken/Shôtoku

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<sup>759</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (i) 2012: 2/3

was the first emperor to introduce era names consisting of four characters – something strongly influenced by the Chinese one and only female ruler Wu Zetian.<sup>760</sup> Apparently Emperor Wu used era names consisting of four characters derived from certain signs and omens seen by trusted astrologers of even by her as a way to justify her right to the throne. Considering the circumstances around Emperor Shôtoku's ascension to the throne, it could be assumed that she imitated her Chinese counterpart and sought to achieve the same goal.

In any case, the new era name didn't change Emperor Shôtoku's determination to not let her courtiers influence her political decisions. That much could be assumed after reading the Imperial edict from the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 1 (765) that more or less served as a continuation of the edict from the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764). In it, she criticized all those who pressured her into appointing a Crown Prince and also those who wanted to bring the dethroned and exiled Emperor Junnin back.

“【S 3 3】天下政(方)、君(乃)勅(仁)在(乎)、己(可)心(乃)比岐比岐、太子(乎)立(止)念(天)功(乎)欲(須流)物(仁方)不在。然此位(方)、天地(乃)置賜(比)授賜(布)位(仁)在。故是以、朕(毛)天地(乃)明(伎)奇(伎)徵(乃)授賜人(方)出(奈牟止)念(天)在。猶今(乃)間(方)、明(仁)淨(岐)心(乎)以(天)、人(仁毛)伊佐奈(方礼須)、人(乎毛)止毛奈(方須之天)於乃(毛)於乃(毛)貞(仁)能(久)淨(伎)心(乎)以(天)奉仕(止)詔(己止乎)、諸聞食(倍止)詔。復有人(方)、淡路(仁)侍坐(須)人(乎)率來(天)、佐良(仁)帝(止)立(天)天下(乎)治(之米無等)念(天)在人(毛)在(良之止奈毛)念。然其人(方)、天地(乃)宇倍奈(弥)由流(之天)授賜(流)人(仁毛)不在。何(乎)以(天可)知(止奈良方)、志愚(仁)、心不善(之天)天下(乎)治(仁)不足。然(乃)味仁不在。逆惡(伎)仲末呂(止)同心(之天)朝廷(乎)動(之)傾(無止)謀(天)在人(仁)在。何(曾)此人(乎)復立(無止)念(無)。自今以後(仁方)如此(久)念(天)謀(己止)止(止)詔大命(乎)聞食(倍止)宣。”<sup>761</sup>

*[The government of the realm is carried out according to the edicts of the sovereign. The selection of a Crown Prince is not something done according to the desires of people hoping for their own success. The rank of Crown Prince is a rank designated and bestowed by Heaven and Earth. The person to be granted this rank will appear to Us shown clearly by a marvelous sign of Heaven and Earth. Thus for the present interval, We command that all should serve with bright and pure hearts, without enticing people with hopes of becoming Crown Prince or arousing such desires, but serving rightly with pure hearts. Let all hear this.*

*Further, there are apparently some who wish to bring back the person in Awaji, Junnin, and put him back on the throne to govern the realm. However, that person is not one whom Heaven and Earth have recognized as capable. Why should it be that some wish this, when it is known that this person has not the wherewithal to rule the empire, and is lazy and not of good character? He is someone whose heart is like that of the wicked rebel Nakamaro, and who is plotting to cause disorder and ruin the court. How can it be that such people rise up again? We*

<sup>760</sup> See Bender (a) 2013: 46

<sup>761</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.3.5

*command that they from now on cease their plotting. Let all hear the words proclaimed as an edict.]*<sup>762</sup>

According to the proclamation, the emperor indicated that she knew about the intentions of some nobles to try to bring the “*person in Awaji, Junnin*” back on the throne. It could be assumed that these people were dissatisfied with the reascension of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. In order to prevent further bloodshed shortly after her enthronement, the sovereign reminded them that Junnin was at fault for having supported the rebel Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Namely that blunder made the potential return to his previous position impossible. The second part of the edict showed that despite Emperor Shōtoku’s determination to show a different image from that created during her first reign, she still preferred to rule in peace than to shed blood and to destabilize the country. At the same time, that didn’t mean that she wouldn’t fight back against those who intended to attack her.

Shōtoku’s next edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765) could be considered the proof of her determination. In it, the sovereign proclaimed the punishment of Junnin’s nephew Prince Wake.

“【S 3 4】今和氣(仁)勅(久)。先(爾)奈良麻呂等(我)謀反(乃)事起(天)在(之)時(仁方)、仲麻呂(伊)忠臣(止之天)侍(都)。然後(仁)逆心(乎)以(天)朝廷(乎)動傾(止之天)兵(乎)備(流)時(仁)、和氣(伊)申(天)在。此(爾)依(天)官位(乎)昇賜治賜(都)。可久(方阿礼止毛)仲麻呂(毛)和氣(毛)後(仁方)猶逆心以(天)在(家利)。復己(毛)先靈(仁)祈願(幣流)書(乎)見(流仁)云(天)在(良久)、己(我)心(仁)念求(流)事(乎之)成給(天波)、尊靈(乃)子孫(乃)遠流(天)在(乎方)京都(仁)召上(天)臣(止)成(無止)云(利)。復、己怨男女二人在。此(乎)殺賜(幣止)云(天)在。是書(乎)見(流仁)謀反(乃)心(阿礼止方)明(爾)見(都)。是以(天)法(乃未爾未爾)治賜(止)宣。」<sup>763</sup>

*[This is what We decree to Prince Wake: At the time of Tachibana no Naramaro’s treachery, Nakamaro served as a loyal minister. But later there arose in him a rebellious heart, and he sought by preparing military weapons to overturn the court. At that time Wake reported this. Therefore we raised Wake’s court rank. Although they were at first good servants, both Nakamaro and Wake later developed rebellious hearts. Now when We examine the document in which Wake prayed to the spirit of his ancestors, what he states is: ‘My desire if it were to be granted would be to summon the descendants of your exalted spirit from distant exile to Nara and make them ministers.’ Further it says: ‘I have two enemies, a man and a woman. I request that you kill them.’*

*Looking at this document, We see clearly Wake’s treasonous heart. Thus We proclaim that he shall be punished according to the law.]*<sup>764</sup>

Apparently the prince prayed to his ancestors for the death of „a man and a woman“, presumably Emperor Shōtoku and Dōkyō. Shoku Nihongi elaborates further on the reasons for Wake’s treason. According to the narrative, the prince had been one of the nobles dissatisfied with Emperor Shōtoku’s unwillingness to appoint a Crown Prince. Therefore, he plotted together with Awata no Michimaro, Ōtsu no Ōura and Ishikawa no Nagatoshi. Apparently Wake had gone to the priestess (shamaness) Ki no Masume and asked her to express her, and presumably also the Heavens’, support for his candidacy for the position of Crown Prince. Unfortunately for him, the plan was revealed and he was caught in

<sup>762</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 52

<sup>763</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.8

<sup>764</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 53

his attempt to escape. He was sent into exile in the province Izu, but eventually was strangled to death before his arrival there.<sup>765</sup> According to both the Imperial edict and the chronicle from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1, Prince Wake's crime was considered inexcusable and therefore he had to be punished accordingly.

Emperor Shōtoku's next proclamation showed her benevolent side. It was issued together with the edict about Prince Wake's punishment in the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765).

“【S 3 5】粟田道麻呂・大津大浦・石川長年等(爾)勅(久)。朕師大臣禪師(乃)宣(久)。愚痴(仁)在奴(方)思和久事(毛)無(之天)、人(乃)不当無礼(止)見咎(牟流乎毛)不知(之天)、惡友(爾)所引率(流)物在。是以此奴等(毛)如是(久)逆穢心(乎)癸(天)在(計利止方)、既明(仁)知(奴)。由此(天)理(波)法(乃)未爾未爾治給(倍久)在。然此遍(方)猶道鏡(伊)所賜(天)彼等(我)惑心(乎方)教導(天)貞(久)淨(伎)心(乎)以(天)朝廷(乃)御奴(止)奉仕(之米無止)宣(爾)依(天)、汝等(我)罪(方)免給。”<sup>766</sup>

*[Awata no Michimaro, Ōtsu no Ōura, and Ishikawa no Nagatoshi – to them Our Great Minister and Meditation Monk decrees thus:*

*'Ignorant and stubborn slaves who are without discernment, and do not realize what is improper and irreverent, are influenced by evil companions. I, Dōkyō, have come to know clearly that in these wretches rebellious and filthy hearts have arisen. It is proper that they should now be punished in accordance with the law. However in this instance I will teach and lead their wayward hearts and cause them to serve correctly and purely as true subjects of the court.'*

*Because of Dōkyō's saying this, We pardon your crime.]*<sup>767</sup>

The contents of the proclamation could be described as rather unusual. Apparently Prince Wake's supporters were not punished due to Dōkyō's willingness to “teach and lead their wayward hearts and cause them to serve correctly and purely as true subjects of the court.” Somehow the impression is created that only the monk minister's benevolence spared the conspirators from sharing the prince's fate. It turns out that Emperor Shōtoku had no interest to play the magnanimous ruler for those who acted against her, but it was Dōkyō who pleaded for mercy. From that point of view, the second edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō jingo 1 (765) is unique, as it shows a completely new image of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. While she was determined to maintain the image of a naïve and benevolent ruler during her first reign, she acted completely opposite to that at the beginning of her second rule. It seems that she was set on stabilizing her position on the throne even if she had to shed the blood of many people in order to do so. Apparently it was her “healer”, the monk minister Dōkyō, who counterbalanced her destructive actions and appealed to her good nature which she had abandoned in an attempt to justify her reascension. Thus, the edict possibly revealed, albeit indirectly, the reason for Dōkyō's entry into the political life of the country: he had the responsibility to protect the emperor's humanity, a task which corresponded to his supposed “healing abilities”.

<sup>765</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.8

<sup>766</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 1.8

<sup>767</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 54

Apparently the monk's loyal service didn't go unnoticed by his sovereign. In her edict from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 1 (765), Emperor Shôtoku rewarded Dôkyô with the position of Dajô-daijin-zenshi (First Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk).

“【S 3 6】今勅(久)。太政官(乃)大臣(方)奉仕(倍伎)人(乃)侍坐時(仁方)、必其官(乎)授賜物(仁)在。是以、朕師大臣禪師(能)朕(乎)守(多比)助賜(乎)見(礼方)、内外二種(乃)人等(仁)置(天)其理(仁)慈哀(天)過無(久毛)奉仕(之米天志可等)念(保之米之天)可多良(比)能利(多布)言(乎)聞(久仁)、是(能)太政大臣(乃)官(乎)授(末都流仁方)敢(多比奈牟可等奈毛)念。故是以、太政大臣禪師(能)位(乎)授(末都留止)勅御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)宣。復勅(久)、是位(乎)授(末都良牟等)申(佐方)必不敢伊奈(等)宣(多方牟止)念(之天奈毛)、不申(之天)是(能)太政大臣禪師(乃)御位授(末都流等)勅御命(乎)、諸聞食(等)宣。」<sup>768</sup>

*[Now We decree: When there is a suitable person to serve as the Great Minister of the Great Council of State that person should certainly be appointed to the office. Thus seeing that Our priest, the Great Minister and Meditation Monk Dôkyô has been guarding and aiding Us, and considering that both the priesthood and the laity are the recipients of his compassion and that he has served the court without error, and hearing people's words speaking warmly of him, We feel that if We bestow on him this office of First Minister of the Great Council of State he will be able to bear the weight of the responsibility.*

*Thus We confer the position of First Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk. Let all hear these words that are the command of the Empress. Further We decree that since, if We state to him that We confer this position, he will say, "I am unable", We confer this position without expressing it directly to him. Let all hear the words proclaimed as an edict.]<sup>769</sup>*

The appointment came after Emperor Shôtoku's royal progress in the province Kii with which the sovereign celebrated the suppression of Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion and her reascension to the throne. It was a memorable event in which the emperor visited the sites of ancient palaces and tombs and honored her predecessors. Moreover, it was during this progress that Emperor Shôtoku received the news about the death of the Lord of Awaji, the dethroned Emperor Junnin. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the emperor's trip seemed undisturbed by that report and she traveled further, to Dôkyô's home province Kawachi. It seems that the edict from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 1 (765) came as an award for the monk's loyal service during the progress. The time of the appointment was precisely chosen by the emperor. After having traveled across the country for a whole month and let the people make personal contact with their sovereign, she was confident enough that hers and Dôkyô's enemies would not be able to prevent his elevation in rank.

The edict from the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 1 (765) continued a tendency set with Dôkyô's first appointment as Daijin-zenshi on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764). In the Imperial edict from that time, it could be read that "Although he has not asked it for himself, We appoint the meditation monk Dôkyô as Great Minister and Meditation Monk." The proclamation with which the monk was appointed Dajô-daijin-zenshi continued that style, as it narrated that "Thus We confer the position of First Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk. [...] Further We decree that since, if We state to him that We confer this position, he will say, "I am unable", We confer this position without expressing it directly to him." If one compares these two edicts, there are certainly

<sup>768</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.10.2

<sup>769</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 55

similarities to be found. Somehow the impression is created that Dôkyô never sought political power or influence, but he was nonetheless awarded by his sovereign. It remains unclear why Emperor Shôtoku was set on creating such an image for Dôkyô. It could be speculated that she wanted to use him as a tool to counterbalance the Fujiwara influence at court. It could also be assumed that she regarded the monk as her personal “healer”, the person who guided her back to the Buddhist teachings and moral values when she immersed herself in her responsibilities as a ruler. Another possibility is that she wanted to show all her enemies that regardless of whether they liked it or not, she was the person holding absolute authority and only she had the freedom to appoint whomever she wanted as her minister. Last but not least, it could even be said that by elevating a monk of humble origins to such high political positions the emperor wanted to use him as a shield to which all hatred and dissatisfaction would have been turned. As there is no evidence for any of those theories, however, they remain no more than speculations.

The next important edict of Emperor Shôtoku dates back to the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 1 (765) and is closely connected with her duties as main priest of the indigenous religion as well as her justification as a ruler.

“【S 3 8】今勅(久)。今日(方)大新嘗(乃)猶良比(乃)豐明聞行日(仁)在。然此遍(能)常(余利)別(仁)在故(方)、朕(方)仏(能)御弟子(等之天)菩薩(乃)戒(乎)受賜(天)在。此(仁)依(天)上(都)方(波)三宝(仁)供奉。次(仁方)天社国社(乃)神等(乎毛)為夜(備末都利)、次(仁方)供奉(留)親王(多知)臣(多知)百官(能)人等、天下(能)人民諸(乎)愍賜慈賜(牟等)念(天奈毛)還(天)復天下(乎)治賜。

[...] 復勅(久)、神等(乎方)三宝(余利)離(天)不觸物(曾止奈毛)人(能)念(天)在。然經(乎)見(末都礼方)、仏(能)御法(乎)護(末都利)尊(末都流方)諸(乃)神(多知仁)伊末(志家利)。故是以、出家人(毛)白衣(毛)相雜(天)供奉(仁)豈障事(波)不在(止)念(天奈毛)、本忌(之可)如(久方)不忌(之天)、此(乃)大嘗(方)聞行(止)宣御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)宣。”<sup>770</sup>

*[We now decree: Now is the day when We partake of the Copious Brightness of the Grand Banquet of the Great Thanksgiving Festival. However this time it is extremely unusual in that We participate as a disciple of the Buddha who has received the Bodhisattva precepts. Thus serving first the Three Treasures, next revering the various kami of the heavenly kami shrines and the earthly kami shrines, and finally cherishing with mercy and compassion the imperial princes, the ministers, the hundred officials, and the people under Heaven who serve Us, We return again to the imperial rank to administer the realm.*

*[...] We further decree: The people believe that the kami should be separate from the Buddhas and should not have contact with them. However when We examine the Buddhist scriptures, we see that the gods are to protect the Buddhist law and respect it. How then can there be a restriction on those who have left the world and the white-robed people mingling together? What has formerly been a taboo on Buddhist priests participating in the ceremony is no longer forbidden, and thus shall the Great Thanksgiving Festival be performed. Let all hear the words proclaimed as an edict. ]<sup>771</sup>*

<sup>770</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 1.11.23

<sup>771</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 57

As it could be surmised, the Niiname-sai in which the sovereign participated was her first since her reascension to the throne as Emperor Shôtoku and it was also the last part of her enthronement ceremony (Daijô-sai (大嘗祭)). After the formalities were completed, Shôtoku was officially recognized as an emperor, the undisputed sovereign of the country who was approved by the Heavens. While the said ceremony was a part of the enthronement of every emperor of Japan, Emperor Shôtoku created the impression of something extraordinary taking place by purposefully emphasizing the fact that she participated in it *“as a disciple of the Buddha who has received the Bodhisattva precepts.”* By pointing out her identity as a Buddhist nun and at the same time her reverence for the *“various kami of the heavenly kami shrines and the earthly kami shrines”*, the emperor wanted to present herself as the person who could serve as a bridge between Buddhism and Shintô. Such a strategy was also seen from Emperor Tenmu when he tried to create his image as the unifying figure for all religions in the country. In his case, he adopted Taoist knowledge and rituals in order to bring Buddhism and Shintô closer and eventually to make them dependent on each other. Aside from that, Ross Bender sees certain parallels between Shôtoku’s and Shômu’s views in regard to their religious beliefs and their responsibilities as sovereigns whose duty was to represent the indigenous Japanese religion.

“Shôtoku had by this time received the Bodhisattva ordination from Ganjin and was very consciously participating in the rite as a disciple of the Buddha. She rehearsed the position first articulated by her father Shômu that the Sovereign serves first the Three Treasures, next reveres the various kami of the heavenly kami shrines and the earthly kami shrines, and finally cherishes the princes, the ministers, the Hundred Officials, and the people under Heaven. However, she took this formulation beyond that of Shômu [...]”<sup>772</sup>

As Bender rightfully points out, Shôtoku certainly brought the strategies of her Imperial predecessors to another level: she literally embodied the unification of Shintô and Buddhism since she was already an ordained Buddhist nun, on the one hand, and a ruler of the state on whose shoulders laid the responsibility to represent the indigenous Japanese religion as its high priest and thus to be the connection between the kami and the people, on the other hand. In contrast to the emperors Tenmu and Shômu, she didn’t need to rely on artificially created connections between the two religious ideologies, as she was literally the living bridge between the two worlds: that of the kami and that of the Buddhas. This edict most certainly displayed Emperor Shôtoku’s political prowess and intelligence. Instead of abandoning her identity as a Buddhist nun, she simply interwove it with her other side: that of emperor and main priest of the indigenous religion of the people. Considering the fact that she supported a Buddhist monk as her most trusted minister, it could be assumed that Shôtoku wanted to create a new form of Buddhism and Shintô – that in which the two religions would not oppose each other but rather march forward hand in hand. That intention of hers could be further confirmed after seeing the politics led by her First Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk. Under Dôkyô’s tutelage, the process of creating State Buddhism was sped up. His politics were mainly religiously-oriented, beginning with small-scale decrees such as the one which forbade the raising of falcons and dogs for hunting, or the one which prohibited the presentation of fish and meat for the emperor’s table. As Bender points out, his bigger projects included

“...the acceleration of the construction of the Kokubunniji; these were to have been financed with monies from local sustenance lands, but there were apparently cases where provincial officials had appropriated the revenue and were delaying building operations. Allied to this was the policy of founding new temples, the greatest of which was Saidaiji. Existing establishments received lavish donations from the empress, who made frequent pilgrimages

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<sup>772</sup> Bender 2021: 104



to the great temples in the Yamato area; often she bestowed court rank on those involved in their building.”<sup>773</sup>

A confirmation of the monk’s politics could be found in Shoku Nihongi’s chronicle from the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 1 (770) that narrates the death of Emperor Shôtoku. In it, it could be read that “*Labor hand was utilized for the repair of temples. Government and people suffered and the state resources were not fully utilized.*” as a part of Dôkyô’s strategies to support Buddhism.

On a different note, another side of Emperor Shôtoku can be seen in her next edict dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 2 (766). It read,

“【S 4 0】今勅(久)、掛畏(岐)近淡海(乃)大津宮(仁)天下所知行(之)天皇(我)御世(爾)奉侍(末之之)藤原大臣、復後(乃)藤原大臣(爾)賜(天)在(留)志乃比己止(乃)書(爾)勅(天)在(久)、子孫(乃)淨(久)明(伎)心(乎)以(天)朝廷(爾)奉侍(牟乎波)必治賜(牟)、其繼(方)絶不賜(止)勅(天)在(我)故(爾)、今藤原永手朝臣(爾)右大臣之官授賜(止)勅天皇御命(遠)、諸聞食(止)宣。」<sup>774</sup>

*[We now decree: In the texts of the eulogistic documents of the Fujiwara Great Minister Kamatari who served at the time of the Emperor Tenji, whose name is invoked with awe and fear, and who reigned over the empire from the court of Ôtsu in Ômi, and in those of the later Fujiwara Great Minister Fuhito, it was stated:*

*‘We shall certainly appoint to office those descendants of the Fujiwara Great Minister who serve the court with clear and bright hearts. We shall not cut off their inheritance.’*

*Therefore We now confer on Fujiwara no Asomi Nagate the office of Great Minister of the Right. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>775</sup>*

As it could be seen, even though the position of the Fujiwara family had certainly been weakened after Nakamaro’s rebellion and death, the emperor didn’t see the need to completely exclude its members from the political life. She presented herself as a magnanimous ruler who was able to differentiate between the sin of one member of the family and the talents of the other. In this edict, Emperor Shôtoku once more portrayed herself as a ruler who revered her predecessors (both Imperial and Fujiwara). She followed Fujiwara no Fuhito’s words to “*appoint to office those descendants of the Fujiwara Great Minister who serve the court with clear and bright hearts. We shall not cut off their inheritance.*”, thus showing filial piety toward her descendant.

At the same time, the political reorganization continued. The edict from the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 1 (767) narrates the establishment of a new institution called Office of Imperial Pages (内豎省; Naijushô). According to Ross Bender, “*...this was a reconfiguration and expansion of the old Naijudokoro, an essential agency for communicating imperial directives.*”<sup>776</sup>

“始置内豎省。以正三位弓削御淨朝臣淨人為卿。中納言衛門督・上總守如故。從四位上藤原朝臣是公為大輔。左衛士督・下總守如故。從五位下藤原朝臣雄依為少輔。右衛

<sup>773</sup> Bender (d) 1979: 140

<sup>774</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 2.1.8

<sup>775</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 59

<sup>776</sup> Bender 2021: 118

士督如故。從五位下田口朝臣安麻呂為大丞。大丞二員。少丞二員。大録一員。少録三員。」”

*[Commence the establishment of Naijushô. We appoint Senior Third Rank Yuge Mikiyo no Asomi Kiyohito as Head of the new office. He would continue to fulfill his duties as Dainagon, Commander of the Outer Palace Guards and Governor of Province Kazusa. We appoint Upper Junior Fourth Rank Fujiwara no Asomi Korekimi as Senior Assistant. He will also continue to fulfill his duties as Commander of the Left Palace Guards and Governor of Province Shimôsa. We appoint Lower Junior Fifth Rank Fujiwara no Asomi Oyori as Junior Assistant, with him remaining Commander of the Right Palace Guards. We appoint Lower Junior Fifth Rank Taguchi no Asomi Yasumaro as Senior Secretary. We appoint two Senior Secretaries, two Junior Secretaries, one Senior Clerk and two Junior Clerks.]*<sup>777</sup>

As it could be seen, Yuge no Kiyohito, Dôkyô's younger brother, was honored by the emperor and given the responsibility for the new office, with him now holding four positions simultaneously. At the same time, one can not oversee the fact that despite Kiyohito's appointment as Head of the Naijushô, the newly established institution was dominated by the Fujiwara by sheer weight of numbers. One could assume that the Head would have been effectively kept in check by his subordinates who happened to be also members of the most powerful family at court. At the same time, in his capacity as a Head of the agency, Kiyohito would have been able to oppose his opponents' influence. It could be assumed that these appointments were part of Emperor Shôtoku's strategy to counterbalance the influence of the Fujiwara clan by that of the members of the Yuge clan, and thus to effectively keep both parties in check.

Anyway, Emperor Shôtoku's Imperial edict dated to the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô jingo 2 (766) seems much more interesting. It is a rather long senmyô that narrates several appointments, with that of Dôkyô as Hô-ô (King of the Law) probably the most remarkable among them.

“【S 4 1】今勅(久)。無上(岐)仏(乃)御法(波)、至誠心(乎)以(天)拜尊(備)獻(礼波)、必異奇驗(乎)阿良波(之)授賜物(爾)伊末(志家利)。然今示現賜(弊流)如来(乃)尊(岐)大御舍利(波)、常奉見(余利波)大御色(毛)光照(天)甚美(久)、大御形(毛)円満(天)別好(久)大末之(末世波)、特(爾)久須之(久)奇事(乎)思議(許止)極難(之)。是以、意中(爾)昼(毛)夜(毛)倦怠(己止)無(久)、謹(美)礼(末比)仕奉(都都)侍(利)。是実(爾)化(能)大御身(波)縁(爾)隨(天)度導賜(爾波)時(乎)不過行(爾)相応(天)慈(備)救賜(止)云言(爾)在(良之止奈毛)念(須)。猶(之)法(乎)興隆(之)牟流爾波)、人(爾)依(天)繼比呂(牟流)物(爾)在。故諸(乃)大法師等(乎)比岐為(天)上(止)伊麻(須)太政大臣禪師(乃)如理(久)勸行(波之米)教導賜(爾)依(天之)、如此(久)奇(久)尊(岐)驗(波)顯賜(弊利)。然此(乃)尊(久)宇礼志(岐)事(乎)、朕独(乃)味夜)喜(止)念(天奈毛)、太政大臣朕大師(爾)法王(乃)位授(末都良久止)勅天皇御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)宣。復勅(久)、此(乃)世間(乃)位(乎波)樂求(多布)事(波)都(天)無、一道(爾)志(天)、菩薩(乃)行(乎)修(比)、人(乎)度導(牟止)云(爾)、心(波)定(天)伊末(須)。可久(波阿礼止毛)、猶朕(我)敬報(末川流)和佐(止之天奈毛)此(乃)位冠(乎)授(末川良久止)勅天皇(我)御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)宣。次(爾)、諸大法師(可)中(仁毛)、

<sup>777</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 1.7.10

此二禪師等(伊)同心(乎)以(天)相從、道(乎)志(天)、世間(乃)位冠(乎波)不樂伊末(佐倍止毛奈毛)猶不得止(天)円興禪師(爾)法臣位授(末川流)。基真禪師(爾)法參議大律師(止之天)冠(波)正四位上(乎)授(氣)、復物部淨(之乃)朝臣(止)云姓(乎)授(末川流止)勅天皇(我)御命(乎)、諸聞食(止)宣。復勅(久)。此寺(方)朕外祖父先(乃)太政大臣藤原大臣之家(仁)在。今其家之名(乎)繼(天)明(可仁)淨(伎)心(乎)以(天)朝廷(乎)奉助(理)仕奉(流)右大臣藤原朝臣(遠波)左大臣(乃)位授賜(比)治賜。復吉備朝臣(波)朕(我)太子(等)坐(之)時(余利)、師(止之天)教悟(家流)多(乃)年歷(奴)。今(方)身(毛)不敢(阿流良牟)物(乎)、夜昼不退(之天)護助奉侍(遠)見(礼波)、可多自氣奈(弥奈毛)念(須)。然人(止之天)恩(乎)不知恩(乎)不報(奴乎波)聖(乃)御法(仁毛)禁給(弊流)物(仁)在。是以(天)、吉備朝臣(仁)右大臣之位授賜(止)勅(布)天皇(我)御命(乎)諸聞食(止)宣。<sup>778</sup>

*[We now proclaim that when the supreme Buddhist law is venerated and worshipped with a pure heart of devotion, then unquestionably marvelous omens will appear. However this awesome and venerable relic of the Buddha is extraordinarily beautiful, more beautiful than We have ever seen. Its color is shining bright, its form is exceedingly round and full, and it is almost painful to view this wonderfully remarkable object. Therefore in Our heart both day and night We have worshipped it attentively and reverently without weariness. Truly I have been thinking that this is "how in saving this transient shell of ours according to its condition, we are immediately saved by grace according to our actions." Moreover people need to inherit and spread the Buddhist Law for it to rise and flourish. It is because the Prime Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk Dōkyō, leading all the great priests of the Law, has exhorted, led and educated, that such a wonderfully august sign was revealed. Shall We alone rejoice over this venerably joyous matter? So now We confer on our priest Dōkyō the rank of King of the Law. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Furthermore he has, not seeking or desiring the ranks of this world, concentrated on the one Way, fixed his heart on practicing the actions of a Bodhisattva and leading persons across to salvation. Despite this, We confer this court rank to requite his good actions. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Next, among all the great priests of the Law there are two with hearts like Dōkyō who concentrate on the Way and do not desire the ranks of the world. Thus we cannot help but confer on the meditation monk Enkō the rank of Minister of the Law. We confer on the meditation monk Kishin the rank of Councilor of the Law and Teacher of the Statutes. With regard to rank We confer on him Senior Fourth Upper Rank, and further bestow the kabane of Mononobe no Kiyoshi Asomi. Let all hear the words of the Empress that she decrees as an edict.*

*The Empress further decrees: This temple, Hokkeji, was the house of my maternal grandfather, the First Minister of the Great Council of State Fujiwara no Fuhito. Continuing the illustrious name of this family, We confer upon the Great Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Nagate who with a bright and pure heart serves and assists the court, the office of Great Minister of the Left. Further, since the time when I was Crown Princess, many years have passed in which our Minister Kibi no Makibi as my teacher has taught and enlightened me. At present although he has aged, yet he protects and assists without retiring night and day, and We feel great*

<sup>778</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyō jingo] 2.10.20

*gratitude. In the law of the Sages it was prohibited for a person to receive a reward for a favor if he did not know about the debt. Therefore, acknowledging our debt, We confer on Kibi no Asomi the office of Great Minister of the Right. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]*<sup>779</sup>

This rather long edict begins somewhat untraditionally, as it speaks of omens which supposedly appeared due to Emperor Shôtoku's veneration of the Buddhist laws. This proclamation sets the beginning of a series of religious-mystical edicts which served as a proof of Emperor Shôtoku's deliberately created strategy – to justify her political decisions through the presentation and interpretation of various auspicious omens.

There are several possible reasons hidden behind the emperor's decision to rely on such signs as a justification tool. As it was already discussed, the practice of connecting the appearance of auspicious signs to political decisions was nothing new. Previous emperors had also answered to portents such as drought, earthquakes, famine or epidemics with political countermeasures taken to relieve the suffering of the people. It was, however, during Emperor Shômu's reign when the occurrence of natural events began to be interpreted as the Heavens' response to the reign of the respective ruler. After a devastating series of natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and famine accompanied by epidemics, Kôken/Shôtoku's father began to search for a way to soothe the Heavens by turning to religion. Later on, it seemed that his daughter had decided to follow in his footsteps. There are certain indications of Kôken/Shôtoku's reliance on auspicious omens even during her first reign when she interpreted the appearance of the characters 天下太平 (tenka taihei; "Peace in the realm") on a palace curtain as the Heavens' approval of her decision to depose Crown Prince Funado. That dependency on unnatural portents reached new heights after the reascension of Retired Emperor Kôken and the begin of her second reign as Emperor Shôtoku. As it was already discussed, during the second rule of the last female emperor of Nara Japan, the comparably huge number of twenty-one omens was reported, with the most of them having appeared after Tenpyô jingo 2 (766). On closer examination of the subject of Emperor Shôtoku's edicts from 766 on, it could be seen that two senmyô among the six dating from that year are on a religious-mystical themes. The next year 767 is somewhat scarce of Imperial edicts, but even then, the only senmyô from that year narrated the sighting of auspicious clouds which resulted in the change of the era name. For the year 769, the number of Imperial edicts on religiously-mystical themes rose to three.

As it was already briefly discussed, the tendency to understand and interpret auspicious omens was regulated by the Ritsuryô code (specifically in the section Giseiryô 擬制令). According to those regulations,

"Omens [shôzui] appear in response to the actions of the ruler. If unicorns, phoenixes, tortoises, or dragons appear, and according to the omen books they are great omens, they should be reported immediately. The report should include an accurate description of its color and shape and where it was sighted; such reports should not be exaggerated. Superior omens on down should be reported to the proper officials, who should report them up to the emperor on the following New Year's Day. Omens that are birds or beasts and are captured alive should be returned to the wild after noting their description. Otherwise they should be sent to the Jibushô. In the case of those that cannot be captured, or as in the case of intertwined branches

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<sup>779</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 66

that cannot be sent, the local official should determine the truth of it, and then have a drawing made and present it. Edicts will be issued periodically announcing rewards as appropriate.”<sup>780</sup>

Following those prescriptions and her own affinity with such justification strategies, Emperor Shôtoku established a reporting system which constantly supplied her with fresh influx of auspicious omens. According to that system, the persons who presented propitious portents to the court had to be rewarded according to the importance and meaning of the said unnatural signs. In most cases, it was the provincial governors who fulfilled that duty. In Shôtoku’s later years, many commoners also presented omens and were rewarded either with government positions or with presents and money. Of course, the mass reporting of omens and their interpretation by many different persons had an inevitable downside: it increased the possibility of falsification of either the omen or its explanation. Considering that, it could be speculated whether Emperor Shôtoku’s decision to rely on auspicious omens before making important political decisions could be attributed solely to her own belief in such things. In a situation when both the omens and/or their interpretation could be falsified, it was much easier for someone to use the unnatural signs in his own favor. For example, according to Ross Bender, Dôkyô had an affinity with omens and prophecies and was well aware how to utilize them to his own advantage. The story narrated in the opening sequence of the edict from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô Jingo 2 (766) about the reverence that ought to be accorded to the Buddhist statue (relic) presented to the emperor in order for “*unquestionably marvelous omens*” to appear eventually was revealed as a fabrication created by a monk who apparently had been Dôkyô’s friend.<sup>781</sup> To further prove his hypothesis about Dôkyô’s affinity with auspicious omens, Bender compiles all reports about omens and the monk’s involvement in them.

“Auspicious five-colored clouds were sighted over Mikawa and Ise in 767; [...] Dôkyô took the opportunity to appoint a relative as second-in-command of the Bureau of Yin-Yang (Onyôryô), which was charged with reporting such omens. In 768 there arrived in Nara a veritable parade of auspicious animals from various provinces: white pheasants, turtles, ravens, and a gray horse with a white tail. Whether Dôkyô orchestrated the procession is not known, but his nephew was the Vice-Governor of the province which presented the pheasants.”<sup>782</sup>

Considering Dôkyô’s educational background, his proficiency in those matters should come as no surprise. After all, his studies encompassed many areas of Buddhism, some of them even esoteric. His knowledge of horoscopes and their interpretation was the reason why he became acquainted with Retired Emperor Kôken in the first place. As it could be seen, Dôkyô readily exercised his political power on matters even remotely connected with auspicious omens. It could, therefore, be assumed that the monk found it advantageous to present omens to Emperor Shôtoku. Of course, even if such had been the case, it shouldn’t be forgotten that it was eventually the sovereign who decided whether to follow the “Heavens’ signs” or not.

Anyway, after the opening sequence which sets the beginning of the series of religious-mystically themed Imperial edicts, the proclamation from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô Jingo 2 (766) proceeds with the narrative of the awards given to several courtiers and monks in the form of court ranks or government positions. The first person recognized for his loyal service is Dôkyô. Surprisingly enough, however, the reason for his appointment as Hô-ô (King of the Law) is neither his political achievements nor his wise counsel in his capacity of Prime Minister, but rather the presentation of the “*awesome and venerable relic of the Buddha*” and the possibility of the potential appearance of

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<sup>780</sup> Ritsuryô: Giseiryô, transl. in Bender (a) 2013: 61

<sup>781</sup> See Bender (e) 1980: 41

<sup>782</sup> Bender (e) 1980: 41/42

*“unquestionably marvelous omens”* if it was revered in accordance with the Buddhist law. That designation comes to confirm the speculation that Emperor Shôtoku’s reliance on auspicious omens was only partly due to her own belief in the Heavens’ signs. In this case, the promise of *“unquestionably marvelous omens”* was presented as a part of a religious ceremony, something which a Buddhist nun such as Shôtoku would, and could, not have neglected. Regardless of the fact that the said story influenced Dôkyô’s court position directly, it is once more emphasized that *“he has, not seeking or desiring the ranks of this world, concentrated on the one Way, fixed his heart on practicing the actions of a Bodhisattva and leading persons across to salvation.”*, which continues the tendency to present the monk as someone who did not seek earthly possessions and honors, and was constantly searching only of enlightenment. The sentence itself confirms another speculation from the previous paragraph: that it was eventually the emperor who decided whether or not to believe in the auspicious omens and their interpretation. Seeing how she decided to follow the signs apparently given to her by the Heavens, it could be assumed that she, as a ruler and political figure, saw certain benefits in Dôkyô’s political elevation.

To be precise, however, according to the edict, Dôkyô had not been the only religious figure rewarded with a title and/or court rank. Such had also been the case for the monks Enkô and Kishin who were appointed Minister of the Law and Councilor of the Law and Teacher of the Statutes, respectively. Furthermore, the latter was given Senior Fourth Upper Rank and the kabane of Mononobe no Kiyoshi Asomi. Here, one could speculate that these appointments could be attributed to Emperor Shôtoku’s support of Buddhism and her identity as a nun. But after seeing the next persons rewarded with government positions, that speculation should be reconsidered in a more strategical way. The rank of Minister of the Left was given to Fujiwara no Nagate due to his loyal service, and that of Minister of the Right was awarded to Crown Prince Abe’s former teacher Kibi no Makibi as a gratitude for his guidance. Thus, in a single edict, Emperor Shôtoku showed that she strived to create an independent government with people from different social classes and from various backgrounds. She herself was a Buddhist nun, her Prime Minister was a monk, her Minister of the Left was a member of the powerful Fujiwara family, and her Minister of the Right was a respected scholar. And while it could have been possible for Nagate and Kibi no Makibi to find common ground, that could have hardly been the case for them and Dôkyô. Considering the monk’s humble descent, his untraditional educational background, as well as the way in which he entered the political world, it would have been impossible for a connection to be established between him and the two ministers. On the other hand, both Dôkyô and Emperor Shôtoku had something in common – they were ordained members of the Buddhist clergy. Thus, in times when difficult political decisions had to be made, it could be expected that the Prime Minister would side with the sovereign even if the Ministers of the Left and Right opposed her. As it could be seen, with such governmental structure, it would have been extremely difficult for one person to attain supreme power as had been the case with Fujiwara no Nakamaro during Emperor Junnin’s reign.

Outside the edict, Dôkyô’s brother Kiyohito was appointed to the position of Chûnagon and elevated to the Upper Third rank.<sup>783</sup>

In an edict from the early Jingo keiun 1 (767), the emperor commissioned the establishment of a new institution named Hô-ô gûshiki, Administrative Office of the King of the Law, thus continuing the tendency to appoint Yuge clan members and Fujiwara clan members to similar positions in an attempt to keep both parties in check.

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<sup>783</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平神護 [Tenpyô jingo] 2.10.20

“始置法王宮職。以造宮卿但馬守從三位高麗朝臣福信為兼大夫。大外記遠江守從四位下高丘富連比良麻呂為兼亮。勅旨大丞從五位上葛井連道依為兼大進。少進一人。大属一人。少属二人。」”

*[We order the construction of Hô-ô Gûshiki and appoint the Governor of Province Tajima Junior Third Rank Koma no Asomi no Fukushin as Head and the person in charge of the construction. We appoint Senior Secretary of the Great Council of State and Governor of Province Tôtômi Lower Junior Fourth Rank Takaoka no Muraji Hiramaro as Assistant Head. We appoint the Head of the Office of Edicts and Rituals Upper Junior Fifth Rank Fujii no Muraji Michiyori as Senior Secretary. We also appoint one Junior Secretary, one Senior Clerk and two Junior Clerks.]*<sup>784</sup>

The establishment of an extracodal institution as an appendage of Dôkyô's already high position could be interpreted as a way to highlight his privileged place at court. The authority of the Administrative Office of the King of the Law could be probably compared only with that of the Administrative Office of the Empress (Kôgô gûshiki, 皇后宮識). Both were institutions outside the Ritsuryô code, responsible only before their patrons, the King of the Law and the Empress, respectively. It could be said that the establishment of the Office gave Dôkyô an authority unobstructed by the governmental structures. Apparently it was not uncommon for monks to be elevated in political ranks, albeit not to such positions as Dôkyô. Jinnô shôtoki narrates that,

*[The appointment of priests to government positions began in China with such offices as sêng-cheng and sêng-t'ung. Since even these offices violated the original intent of the holy life, how much improper was it for priests to accept ministerial positions. Nevertheless, during the time of the Sung of the southern dynasties, the priest Hui-lin participated in government and became known as the black-robed prime minister (tsai-hsiang). (It does not appear, however, that Hui-lin formally held this office.) During the Liang dynasty, hui-ch'ao occupied the office of eminent scholar (hsüeh-shih), and in the time of Emperor Ming Yüan of the Northern Wei, Fa-kuo received appointment to the position of lord of An-ch'eng.*

*There were also many cases during the T'ang dynasty of priests participating in government. At the court of Su Tsung, for example, Tao-p'ing enjoyed the full confidence of the emperor, and upon quelling the rebellion of An Lu-shan, was made general of the imperial guards (chin-wu chiang-chün). During the reign Tai Tsung, the Indian priest Amoghavajra was appointed – apparently in an excess of adulation – first to the office of specially advanced and probationary herald (t'e-chin shih hung-lu) and later was permitted to establish a ministry and was given status that called for him to be treated with the same etiquette as the three excellencies (k'ai-fu yi t'ung san-ssu). Even after his death, Amoghavajra was awarded the posthumous title of minister of works (ssu-k'ung). (The minister of works was equivalent to the Japanese office of daijin or great minister.)]*<sup>785</sup>

As it could be seen from that passage, it was common for monks to be appointed to state positions in China even before Kôken/Shôtoku's time. Even though the positions of sêng-cheng and sêng-t'ung seemed to have been of religious nature (they were responsible for the proper behavior of the clergy<sup>786</sup>), they were still posts awarded by the emperor, which directly bound their holders to the political life of the state. As it could be seen from the chronicle, since the first appointment of monks

<sup>784</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 1.3.20

<sup>785</sup> Jinnô shôtoki, transl. by Varley 1980: 146

<sup>786</sup> See Jinnô shôtoki, transl. by Varley 1980: 146

to state positions, that tendency had only accelerated. The posts varied from that of inofficial prime minister (Hui-lin) to that of general of the Imperial guards (Tao-p'ing). In China's case, however, even foreign monks such as the Indian Amoghavajra were elevated in rank and given their own ministry. Even though Emperor Shôtoku didn't go as far as the Chinese emperors, she most likely learnt from them, considering the fact that she immensely respected the only female emperor of China Wu Zetian. On the other hand, it could be assumed that, as in the case with the sighting and interpretation of auspicious omens, the last female ruler of Nara Japan reached a new level in the utilization of already established strategies. Dôkyô's elevation to high political positions could be interpreted as Emperor Shôtoku's way of keeping him in check. After all, the monk's rapid appointment to the highest rank in the government combined with the establishment of a Household Agency/Office as an appendage of his post would have inevitably made him a target of political intrigues and machinations by his political rivals, with Fujiwara being the strongest among them. Even though the family's position has weakened after Nakamaro's rebellion, its members still held a significant number of court ranks and government positions. From that point of view, it could be assumed that the emperor wanted to counterbalance the Fujiwara influence at court by using Dôkyô as her shield. At the same time, however, she used the monk's political elevation as a double-edged sword against him in a way similar to that of Yuge no Kiyohito's appointment as Head of the Naijushô. By creating public dissatisfaction with him, the emperor sought a situation in which the nobles kept Dôkyô in check, with neither side being able to attain absolute power at court.

With the last two edicts being more on a political rather than religiously-mystical theme, one would probably assume that Emperor Shôtoku had continued in that vein in an attempt to stabilize the political situation in the country. Surprisingly enough, however, the one and only senmyô from the next Tenpyô jingo 3/Jingo keiun 1 (767) narrated the sighting of an auspicious omen and the change of the era name to Jingo keiun (神護景雲, literally "godly protection [marked by] auspicious clouds").

“【S 4 2】日本国(爾)坐(天)大八洲国照給(比)治給(布)倭根子天皇(我)御命(良麻止)勅(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。今年(乃)六月十六日申時(仁)東南之角(爾)当(天)甚奇(久)異(爾)麗(岐)雲七色相交(天)立登(天)在。此(乎)朕自(毛)見行(之)、又侍諸人等(毛)共見(天)怪(備)喜(備都都)在間(仁)伊勢国守從五位下阿倍朝臣東人等(我)奏(久)。六月十七日(爾)度会郡(乃)等由氣(乃)宮(乃)上(仁)当(天)五色瑞雲起覆(天)在。依此(天)彼形(乎)書写以進(止)奏(利)。復陰陽寮(毛)七月十五日(爾)西北角(仁)美異雲立(天)在。同月廿三日(仁)東南角(仁)有雲本朱末黄稍具五色(止)奏(利)。如是(久)奇異雲(乃)蹟在(流)所由(乎)令勘(爾)。式部省等(我)奏(久)。瑞書(爾)細勘(爾)是即景雲(爾)在。実合大瑞(止)奏(世利)。然朕念行(久)。如是(久)大(仁)貴(久)奇異(爾)在大瑞(波)、聖皇之御世(爾)至德(爾)感(天)天地(乃)示現(之)賜物(止奈毛)常(毛)聞行(須)。是豈敢朕德(伊)天地(乃)御心(乎)令感動(末都流倍岐)事(波)無(止奈毛)念行(須)。然此(方)大御神宮上(爾)示蹟給。故尚是(方)大神(乃)慈(備)示給(幣流)物(奈犁)。又掛(毛)畏(岐)御世御世(乃)先(乃)皇(我)御靈(乃)助給(比)慈給(幣流)物(奈犁)。復去正月(爾)二七日之間諸大寺(乃)大法師等(乎)奏請(良倍天)最勝王經(乎)令講讚(末都利)、又吉祥天(乃)悔過(乎)令仕奉(流爾)諸大法師等(我)如理(久)勤(天)坐(佐比)、又諸臣等(乃)天下(乃)政事(乎)合理(天)奉仕(爾)依(天之)三宝(毛)諸天(毛)天地(乃)神(多知毛)共(爾)示現賜(幣流)奇(久)貴(伎)大瑞(



乃)雲(爾)在(良之止奈毛)念行(須)。故是以、奇(久)喜(之支)大瑞(乎)頂(爾)受給(天)忍(天)默在(去止)不得(之天奈毛)諸王(多知)臣(多知乎)召(天)共(爾)歡(備)尊(備)、天地(乃)御恩(乎)奉報(倍之止奈毛)念行(止)詔(布)天皇(我)御命(遠)、諸聞食(止)宣。然夫天(方)万物(乎)能覆養賜(比)慈(備)愍(美)賜物(仁)坐(須。)又大神宮(乃)禰宜・大物忌・内人等(爾波)叙二級。但御巫以下人等叙一級。又伊勢国神郡二郡司及諸国祝部有位無位等賜一級。又六位以下及左右京男女年六十以上賜一級。但正六位上重三選以上者。賜上正六位上。又孝子・順孫・義夫・孝婦・節婦・力田者賜二級。表旌其門、至于終身田租免給。又五位以上人等賜御手物。又天下諸国今年田租半免。又八十以上老人及鰥寡孤独不能自存者賜糶。又示顯賜(弊流)瑞(乃末爾末仁)年号(波)改賜(布。)是以、改天平神護三年。為神護景雲元年(止)詔(布)天皇(我)御命(遠)、諸聞食(止)宣。又天下有罪。大辟罪已下。罪無輕重。已発覚。未発覚。已結正。未結正。繫囚・見徒。咸赦除之。但犯八虐。故殺人。私鑄錢。強窃二盜。常赦所不免者。不在赦限。普告天下、知朕意焉。」陰陽員外助從五位下紀朝臣益麻呂叙正五位下。允正六位上山朝臣船主從五位下。(今檢。景雲二年始賜朝臣。此擲位記而書之。)<sup>787</sup>

*[We command that all give ear to the pronouncement spoken by the Empress, Beloved Child of Yamato who, abiding in the land of Yamato, governs brilliantly the Land of the Great Eight Islands.*

*On the sixteenth day of the sixth month, at the hour of the monkey, particularly awesome and especially beautiful seven-colored clouds arose together in the southeast quadrant. While We Ourselves were watching, with Our attendants nearby, and marveling and rejoicing, the Ise Governor, Junior Fifth Rank Lower Grade Abe no Asomi Azumabito and others reported: 'On the 17th day of the sixth month, above the shrine of Toyuke in Watarai district, five-colored auspicious clouds arose and covered the sky. Therefore we have drawn a picture of the shape of this cloud and forwarded it to the court.' Moreover the Bureau of Yin-Yang reported 'On the tenth day of the seventh month in the northwest quadrant a particularly beautiful cloud arose. On the twenty-third day of the same month clouds arose in the southeast quadrant, beginning as red and ending yellow, all together about five colors.'*

*When the reason for these particularly awesome clouds was investigated, the Bureau of Ceremonial reported: 'When we perused in detail the books of auspicious omens, we found that these were "Auspicious Clouds", and truly signified a great good omen.'*

*We have heard that in the past such a great sign, so remarkable and auspicious, was revealed by Heaven and Earth in response to the virtue of an era of a Sage Emperor. We dare not presume that Our virtue is such to move the heart of Heaven and Earth. However, these things have been manifested above the shrine of the Great Kami at Ise. Hence this is a thing the Great Kami has graciously revealed, and moreover that the spirits of the earlier emperors of age upon age, whose names are invoked with awe and fear, have graciously assisted. Further it is because in the first month I invited the great priests of the various great temples to expound for two seven-day periods the Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings and caused them to practice*

<sup>787</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 1.8.16

*the repentance rite of Kichijōten. Thus the great priests together with the officials of the government of the realm all served correctly and the Three Treasures, the various devas, and the kami of heaven and earth together revealed the wonderful and venerable great sign.*

*Consequently, humbly receiving the awesome and joyous great good omen and unable to keep silent, now We summon all the princes and the ministers so that rejoicing and worshipping together, We shall respond to the graciousness of Heaven and Earth. We command that all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Now Heaven is something that well nourishes the ten thousand things, and is gracious and merciful to all creatures. To the Shinto priests – the negi, the ōmonoimi, and the uchibito -- of the Shrine of the Great Kami We award two grades of rank. To the mikannagi on down We award one grade. Also to district officials of the two sacred districts of Ise Province and on the hafuri with and without rank of all the provinces We award one grade.*

*Also to the sixth grade and below and men and women of the age of sixty and above of the Left and Right Capital We award one grade. To those of the Senior Sixth Rank and up We grant gifts in accordance with precedent.*

*Also to filial children, obedient grandchildren, virtuous husbands, filial wives, chaste women and hard-working peasants We award two grades of rank. Special signs should be put on the gates of their homes, and to the end of their lives We exempt them from rice field tax. Also to persons of fifth rank and above We grant gifts from Our hand. We remit half of this year's rice field tax to all provinces of the empire. Also to those over eighty years of age, to widowers, widows, orphans, and those solitaries unable to provide for themselves, We grant unhulled rice. Further, in accordance with the fortunate omen which heaven has revealed, We change the era name. We command that Tenpyō Jingo 3 be changed to Jingo Keiun 1. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>788</sup>*

This rather long Imperial edict continues the tendency shown previously by the emperor for her to rely on auspicious omens when making political decisions. In contrast to the previous edict according to which only the promise of the potential appearance of “*unquestionably marvelous omens*” contributed to the political elevations of Dōkyō and several other monks and courtiers, this time the actual sighting of odd-colored clouds led to mass rewards for many people in the form of court ranks or exemption from rice field tax. Furthermore, the interpretation of the omen eventually brought forth the change of the era name from Tenpyō jingo to Jingo keiun.

In general, the edict from the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo Keiun 1 (767) has an interesting structure. The first paragraph contains the traditional Shintō opening of an Imperial proclamation. In the second part, the sighting of odd-colored clouds in different provinces is narrated. Then, in the third section, the interpretation of the auspicious omen is explained. The most remarkable part of the edict, however, is its fourth paragraph. As one can see, in that section, not only the Buddhist deities and the Three Treasures but also the “*Great Kami at Ise*”, that is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, are mentioned. Moreover, the appearance of auspicious clouds is attributed to Heaven and Earth and their respective deities who apparently responded to the virtue of “*an era of a Sage Emperor*”. That sentence could be understood as a direct indication of the virtuousness of the sitting sovereign. As the portent wasn't seen elsewhere but exactly above the Ise Shrine, the conclusion could be drawn that it was the Shintō deities and the spirits of the previous emperors who approved of the current ruler and her reign. The second part of the fourth paragraph could also be interpreted as a continuation of the previous senmyō

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<sup>788</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 62/64

from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô Jingo 2 (766) which stated that “when the supreme Buddhist law is venerated and worshipped with a pure heart of devotion, then unquestionably marvelous omens will appear”. Apparently the appearance of the auspicious omen not once but several times had been the result of the deities’ immense satisfaction with the reverence accorded to them by emperor, nobles and common people alike. The next parts of the edict are typical of the standard response to the sighting of an auspicious omen: awarding of court ranks, temporary or permanent exemption from taxes, rice grants and, last but not least, the change of the era name.

This edict could be considered an end of an “inner era” within Emperor Shôtoku’s reign. It marked the stabilization of the political situation after Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s rebellion. Emperor Shôtoku needed almost three years to punish all supporters of her cousin, and it was only in the year before that when she was able to appoint reliable persons as members of her Great Council of State. Therefore, it could be assumed that Jingo keiun 1 (767) marked by the continuous appearance of odd-colored clouds had been the first politically peaceful year since the reascension of Kôken/Shôtoku. Further proof of that could be seen in a table compiled by Ross Bender according to which the said year set the beginning of a long series of auspicious omens.<sup>789</sup> The following Jingo keiun 2 (768) was a year full of portents, with the remarkable number of six. It should be noted that all the omens were in the form of unusually looking animals. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, for example, the emperor received a white deer from the province Harima.<sup>790</sup> Then, on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, a white pheasant was sighted and reported to the sovereign. In that case, however, the appearance of the auspicious omen was followed by an Imperial edict.

“武蔵国献白雉。勅。朕以虚薄。謬奉洪基。君臨四方。子育万類。善政未洽。每兢情於負重。淳風或虧。常駭念於馭奔。於是。武蔵国 [...] 於同国久良郡。獲白雉献焉。即下群卿議之。奏云。雉者斯群臣一心忠貞之応。白色乃聖朝重光照臨之符”<sup>791</sup>

*[We received a white pheasant from the Province Musashi. Let all hear the Imperial edict. We are still unprepared and weak and Our foundation is full of mistakes. As We rule over the realm, We should care for and support all people, but Our government is still far from good. These feelings constantly concern Us like a tender caress of the wind and that knowledge constantly torments Us like a galloping horse. Still, in the District Guraki in the Province Musashi, a white pheasant was captured and presented to Us. We summoned the ministers to discuss the matter and they said to Us: ‘The appearance of a pheasant is heaven’s response to the fact that the nobles are united in one heart in allegiance to the sovereign. That the pheasant is white is a sign that the Sagely reign continues to illumine the land.’]*<sup>792</sup>

As it could be seen, this time the appearance of the auspicious omen was interpreted as a sign of the nobles’ loyalty toward the sovereign. The portent and its interpretation only serve to support the theory that considering the vast omen-reporting and -interpreting system created by the emperor, it was much easier for interested people to manipulate either the sign or its meaning. However, even though the ministers seemingly flattered the emperor by emphasizing that “the Sagely reign continues to illumine the land”, it could be seen that the sovereign didn’t react according to their expectations by awarding court ranks or positions. In that train of thought, it could be assumed that while Shôtoku

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<sup>789</sup> See pp. 342

<sup>790</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 2.1.10

<sup>791</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 2.6.21

<sup>792</sup> Bender (a) 2013: 66

saw it beneficial to receive news about auspicious omens, she still had the last word on whether to accept them as extraordinary and thus worthy of appropriate reaction or not.

The next report is about a toad procession sighted in the province Higo on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month.<sup>793</sup> The most remarkable narrative concerning auspicious omens from Jingo Keiun 2 (768), however, is the edict from the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month in which not one but three appearances of odd-colored animals are narrated.

“勅。今年七月八日。得參河国碧海郡人長谷部文選所獻白鳥。又同月十一日。得肥後国葦北郡人刑部広瀬女。日向国宮崎郡人大伴人益所獻、白龜赤眼。青馬白髮尾。並付所司。令勘凶謀。奏称。顧野王符瑞凶曰。白鳥者太陽之精也。孝經援神契曰。德至鳥獸。則白鳥下。史記曰。神龜者天下之宝也。与物变化。四時變色。居而自匿。伏而不食。春蒼夏赤。秋白冬黑。熊氏瑞応凶曰。王者不偏不党。尊用耆老。不失故旧。德沢流洽。則靈龜出。顧野王符瑞凶曰。青馬白髮尾者神馬也。孝經援神契曰。德協道行。政至山陵。則沢出神馬。仍勘瑞式。白鳥是為中瑞。靈龜・神馬並合大瑞。朕以菲薄。頻荷鴻<sub>二</sub> [貝 + 兄]。思順先典式覃惠沢。”<sup>794</sup>

*[The Tennō gave the following edict:*

*This year on the eighth day of the seventh month We received a white raven...from Mikawa Province. Also on the eleventh day of the same month We received a white tortoise with a red eye... from Higo Province and a grey horse with white mane and tail... from Hyūga Province. The officials consulted the omen books and reported the following:*

*The Furuitu 符瑞凶 of Prince Guye 顧野 says, “A white raven is the numinous spirit of the sun.” According to the Xiaojing Yuanshenqi 孝經援神契, “When virtue extends to the birds and beasts a white raven descends.” The Shiji 史記 says, “A divine turtle is the treasure of Heaven. It together with the ten thousand things changes its color in response to the seasons. It conceals its dwelling place, and does not eat. In spring it is green, in summer it is red, in autumn it is white, in winter it is black.” The Ruiyingtu 瑞応凶 of Master Tai 態 says, “When a king is fair and impartial and the old people are honored, when usages of former times are not lost and the benefits of virtue are extended, then the numinous turtle appears.” The Furuitu of Prince Guye says, “The grey horse with white mane and tale is the Divine Horse.” The Xiaojing Yuanshenqi says, “When the king’s virtue and government extend to the hills and mountains, then the divine horse appears from the valley.” When the omen charts were consulted, it was found that the white crow is a medium omen, while the numinous turtle and the divine horse are great omens.*

*The Tennō responded:*

*“Although Our virtue is weak, such signs are constantly given. In accordance with the teachings of the classics, we desire to extend their blessings to the common people. ...”<sup>795</sup>*

<sup>793</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 2.7.19

<sup>794</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 2.9.11

<sup>795</sup> Bender (a) 2013: 68

The edict continues the tendency already seen in the edict from the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 2 (768) for the emperor to speak ill of her virtues and capacities as a ruler. It could be surmised that she deliberately chose to do so in order to create herself a new image: that of a ruler who still had many things to learn. If one compares the situation during her first reign when she presented herself as a naïve and benevolent ruler only for that mask to be teared down as a result of the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro with the one during her second time on the throne, there are certainly similarities to be found. It could be said that the naïve and benevolent image was created by Emperor Kôken in order for her to be able to lure her political enemies and make them reveal themselves. Now, one could ask what Emperor Shôtoku's purpose was to present herself as a ruler with many flaws and uncertainties. If one sees the events which followed in the next Jingo keiun 3 (769), it would be easy to find the answer. The said year remained in history as the most turbulent one from the second reign of the last female emperor of Nara Japan. It was in Jingo keiun 3 when first the controversy involving the sovereign's half sister Imperial Princess Fuwa was revealed, and then the infamous Dôkyô Incident occurred.

Imperial Princess Fuwa was Emperor Shômu's daughter by his second wife Agatainukai no Hirotoji as well as sister of Imperial Princess Inoe and Prince Asaka. Around 739, she was married off to Prince Shioyaki, who, as it was already mentioned, became infamous due to his involvement in several controversies regarding his conduct. Their marriage was blessed with two sons: Hikami no Shikeshimaro and Hikami no Kawatsugu. Contrary to the expectations that Prince Shioyaki would settle down after his pardon in 745, that seemed to have not been the case. He became involved in several political conspiracies and rebellions, the last one of which even costed him his life. Firstly, he was sent into exile as a punishment for his participation in the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. Then, in 764, he was one of the key figures in the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro. The edict from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) narrated that Shioyaki was proclaimed the "current Emperor" by Nakamaro. For that, he was executed by the Lake Biwa shortly before the suppression of the rebellion. Despite the fate of their husband and father, Imperial Princess Fuwa and her two sons were spared. Nevertheless, five years after Prince Shioyaki's execution and Emperor Shôtoku's enthronement, a member of the Prince's family was once more involved in a conspiracy. This time it was Shôtoku's half sister Fuwa who was accused of cursing the sovereign, apparently in an attempt to put her son Shikeshimaro on the throne.

“【S 4 3】現神(止)大八洲国所知倭根子挂畏天皇大命(乎)、親王・王・臣・百官人等、天下公民、衆聞食(止)宣(久)。犬部姉女(乎波)内(都)奴(止)為(弓)冠位拳給(比)根可婆禰改給(比)治給(伎)。然(流)物(乎)反(天)逆心(乎)抱藏(弓)己為首(弓)忍坂女王・石田女王等(乎)率(弓)、挂畏先朝(乃)依過(弓)棄給(弓之)厨真人厨女許(爾)窃往乍岐多奈(久)惡奴(止母止)相結(弓)謀(家良久)。傾奉朝廷、乱国家(弓)、岐良比給(弓之)氷上塩焼(我)児志計志麻呂(乎)天日嗣(止)為(牟止)謀(弓)挂畏天皇大御髮(乎)盜給(波利弓)、岐多奈(伎)佐保川(乃)鬮體(爾)入(弓)大宮内(爾)持参入来(弓)、厭魅為(流已止)三度(世利)。然(母)盧舍那如来、最勝王經、觀世音菩薩、護法善神梵王・帝釈・四大天王(乃)不可思議威神力、挂畏開闢已来御宇天皇御靈、天地(乃)神(多知乃)護助奉(都流)力(爾)依(弓)、其等(我)穢(久)謀(弓)為(留)厭魅事皆悉発覺(奴)。是以、檢法(爾)皆当死刑罪。由此(弓)

)、理(波)法(末爾末爾)岐良(比)給(倍久)在(利)。然(止毛)慈賜(止)為(弓)一等降(弓)、其等(我)根可婆禰替(弓)遠流罪(爾)治賜(布止)宣(布)天皇大命(乎)、衆聞食(止)宣。<sup>796</sup>

*[Let all, imperial princes, princes, ministers and the hundred officials and all nobles under heaven hear the words of the Empress whose name is invoked with awe and fear, the Beloved Child of Yamato who rules the Land of the Great Eight Islands as a manifest god.*

*We rewarded the household slave Inube no Aneme by raising her rank and granting her a kabane. Despite this she harbored inward treachery and sought to aggrandize herself, and led Princess Oshisaka and Princess Iwata secretly to the home of Kuriya no Mahito Kuriyame whom the former Emperor Junnin, whose name is invoked with fear and awe, had discharged for her crimes. She plotted, allying herself together with other vile and evil slaves, to rebel against the Throne and cause disorder in the state and to give to Shikeshimaro, son of Hikami no Shioyaki, the Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession. They stole hair of this Empress, whose name is to be invoked with awe and fear, and inserted it into a filthy skull at the Saho River then brought it into the interior of the palace. Three times they performed this sorcery.*

*However, by the miraculous force and the divine power of Rushana Nyorai, the Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings, the Kanzeon Bodhisattva, the Five Good Protecting Deities, Brahma, Indra and the Four Heavenly Kings, and the numinous spirits of the Emperors, whose names are invoked with awe and fear and who have ruled the Empire since the foundation of heaven and earth, and by the power of protective assistance granted by the kami of heaven and earth, their filthy hearts and evil deeds have been completely revealed. Their deeds have been examined according to law and their crimes judged worthy of capital punishment. It is proper that they be punished in accordance with the law. However, being merciful, We have lowered the punishment by one degree and merely changed their kabane back to their former kabane and banished them to distant exile. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>797</sup>*

As it could be seen, this time the ones dissatisfied with Emperor Shôtoku's enthronement and her unwillingness to appoint a Crown Prince were her relatives. According to Takinami Sadako, that incident showed that although Retired Emperor Kôken was respected by many after her abdication in 758, her reascension to the throne was not universally recognized by all.<sup>798</sup> According to the edict, a member of the emperor's family, her half sister, had been one of the first nobles who dared to openly express their lack of respect for the sitting sovereign. As Takinami points out, the situation would not have escalated to such heights, had Emperor Shômu been still alive. He would have put an end to the inner dispute and would not have let it take such outrageous dimensions.<sup>799</sup> Unfortunately for both Emperor Shôtoku and Imperial Princess Fuwa, however, he was not there anymore and the two women were left to their own devices. Even though it eventually turned out that the Imperial Princess was falsely accused by a court lady<sup>800</sup>, which resulted in her obtaining a pardon and permission to return to the capital, the whole incident showed that despite Emperor Shôtoku's efforts to justify her reign with religious and mystical means such as prophecies, oracles or auspicious omens, or her political maneuvering in an attempt to stabilize the political climate at court, there were still people dissatisfied with her reascension who were always ready to plot against her.

<sup>796</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.5.29

<sup>797</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 65/66

<sup>798</sup> See Takinami 1998: 162

<sup>799</sup> See Takinami 1998: 162

<sup>800</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝龜 [Hôki] 2.8.8

Anyway, considering the events which took place only several months later, it could be said that the Imperial Princess Fuwa controversy seemed to have been only the beginning. On the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jengo keiun 3 (769), an oracle from Hachiman from Usa was reported to the emperor in which the deity expressed its opinion in favor of Dōkyō's appointment as Crown Prince and Emperor Shōtoku's successor.<sup>801</sup> According to the narrative, instead of accepting the words of the god, the sovereign decided to send someone to prove the veracity of the divination. Eventually, Wake no Kiyomaro was chosen to go to Usa. After his return, he delivered an oracle completely opposite to the previous one, which put an end to the discussion of Dōkyō's potential ascension to the throne. Interestingly enough, instead to become infuriated by the monk's audacity, the emperor accused both Kiyomaro and his sister Hōkin of fraud.

“【S 4 4】天皇(良我)御命(良麻止)詔(久)。夫臣下(等)云物(波)君(仁)随(天)淨(久)貞(仁)明心(乎)以(天)君(乎)助護、对(天方)無礼(岐)面(幣利)無(久)後(仁波)謗言無(久)、姦偽(利)曲(流)心無(之天)奉侍(倍岐)物(仁)在。然物(乎)、從五位下因幡國員外介輔治能真人清麻呂、其(我)姉法均(止)甚大(仁)惡(久)姦(流)妄語(乎)作(天)朕(仁)对(天)法均(伊)物奏(利)。此(乎)見(流仁)面(乃)色形口(爾)云言猶明(爾)已(何)作(天)云言(乎)大神(乃)御命(止)借(天)言(止)所知(奴)。問求(仁)、朕所念(之天)在(何)如(久)、大神(乃)御命(爾波)不在(止)聞行定(都)。故是以、法(乃)麻爾麻(退給(止)詔(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。復詔(久)、此事(方)人(乃)奏(天)在(仁毛)不在。唯言其理(爾)不在逆(爾)云(利)。面(幣利毛)無礼(之天)、已事(乎)納用(与止)念(天)在。是天地(乃)逆(止)云(爾)此(与利)增(波)無。然此(方)諸聖等・天神・地祇現給(比)悟給(爾)已曾(在)禮。誰(可)敢(弓)朕(爾)奏給(牟)。猶人(方)不奏(天)在(等毛)、心中惡(久)垢(久)濁(天)在人(波)必天地現(之)示給(都留)物(曾)。是以、人人已(何)心(乎)明(爾)清(久)貞(爾)謹(天)奉侍(止)詔(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。復此事(乎)知(天)清麻呂等(止)相謀(家牟)人在(止方)所知(天)在(止毛)、君(波)慈(乎)以(弓)天下(乃)政(波)行給物(爾)伊麻(世波奈毛)慈(備)愍(美)給(天)免給(布)。然行事(乃)重在(牟)人(乎波)法(乃)麻爾麻爾(收給(牟)物(曾)。如是狀悟(天)先(爾)清麻呂等(止)同心(之天)一二(乃)事(毛)相謀(家牟)人等(波)心改(天)明(仁)貞(爾)在心(乎)以(天)奉侍(止)詔(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。復清麻呂等(波)奉侍(留)奴(止)所念(天)已曾(姓)毛(賜(弓)治給(天之可)。今(波)穢奴(止之弓)退給(爾)依(奈毛)、賜(幣利之)姓(方)取(弓)別部(止)成給(弓)、其(我)名(波)穢麻呂(止)給(比)、法均(我)名(毛)広虫壳(止)還給(止)詔(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。復明基(波)広虫壳(止)身(波)二(爾)在(止毛)、心(波)一(爾)在(止)所知(弓奈毛)、其(我)名(毛)取給(弓)同(久)退給(等)詔(布)御命(乎)、衆諸聞食(止)宣。」<sup>802</sup>

*[The Empress decrees with these words: The one called a subject is one who follows his lord and assists and protects with a clear, correct and bright heart. The subject should face the*

<sup>801</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.9.25

<sup>802</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.9.25

*sovereign without irreverence. Outside the Presence, the subject is one does not utter slanderous words, and is to serve without a treacherous, deceitful, obsequious or twisted heart.*

*However, Junior Fifth Rank Lower Inaba Province Irregular Assistant Official Fujino no Mahito Kiyomaro, with his elder sister Hōkin, fabricated an exceedingly wicked and treacherous lie that Hōkin, facing Us, reported as the words of a god. When we observed the color of her face and the shape of her mouth as she said these words, We knew clearly that she herself had fabricated the words of the Great Kami Usa Hachiman. When We questioned her and sought the truth, We listened and determined that it was not in fact the pronouncement of the Great Kami. Therefore in accordance with the law of the land, We decree that they be banished – let all hear these words that the Empress decrees.*

*Further We decree: It is not that other people reported that it was a falsehood, but that her own words greatly contravened reason. Her appearance was irreverent and We saw that these were her own words. There is no treason in Heaven and Earth that exceeds this. All the Sages and the kami of Heaven and Earth have revealed and made clear these lies. Who would dare to report this to Us? Although people did not inform Us of this, it was Heaven and Earth that definitely revealed and indicated to me that her heart was evil, filthy and impure. Therefore We now decree that all shall serve with bright and clear hearts, correctly and with diligence. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Furthermore, We have come to know that there are persons who were aware of this matter and conspired together with Kiyomaro and his group. However, your Sovereign compassionately administers the realm, so We, being gracious and compassionate, do hereby pardon them. But if there are those who again attempt such a thing, let them be punished according to the law of the land. The matter now being clear, any persons who were of the same mind with Kiyomaro and his group, and even in one or two particulars conspired with him, shall rectify their hearts and henceforward serve clearly and correctly. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Moreover, We formerly rewarded Kiyomaro as a slave who served Us well and We granted him a kabane. Now We banish him as a filthy wretch, deprive him of the kabane We granted, and change it to Wakebe. We decree that his name shall be Kitanomaro and We return Hōkin to her name of Hiromushime. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.*

*Yet further we decree that since the nun Myōki has the same heart as Hiromushime, We banish her also, and take away her name. Let all hear the words that the Empress proclaims as an edict.]<sup>803</sup>*

From that edict, it becomes clear that instead of ordering Dōkyō's punishment for him daring to try to usurp the throne, the emperor turned her anger toward the brother-sister duo Kiyomaro and Hōkin. As she stated in the senmyō, *"It is not that other people reported that it was a falsehood, but that her own words greatly contravened reason."* Moreover, *"We have come to know that there are persons who were aware of this matter and conspired together with Kiyomaro and his group."* The sovereign directly accused both Hōkin and Kiyomaro of conspiring either against her or against Dōkyō, and, as it will be seen, she had any reason to be suspicious of them.

The most detailed narrative in regard to both Hōkin and Kiyomaro could be found in *Nihon kōki*, a historical text compiled in 840 by the Fujiwara family members Otsugu, Yoshino and Yoshifusa.

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<sup>803</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 67/68



According to it, Wake no Kiyomaro was born in the province Buzen and was later appointed as governor of both his home province and the province Mimasaka. He had an honest and pure personality and was ready to put all his efforts into something which could potentially benefit the others. Throughout his political career, Kiyomaro was given several positions but probably his most important achievement was the Lower Fifth Rank which was awarded to him in Tenpyô jingo 1 (765). His sister Hironushi, who was initially supposed to marry a noble, decided to follow Retired Emperor Kôken instead and was tonsured together with the former ruler of the state. Apparently the siblings enjoyed the trust of the Retired sovereign. It is believed that Hôkin persuaded Kôken to change the death sentences of the rebels who followed Fujiwara no Nakamaro in his rebellion. Moreover, it was Kiyomaro's sister who took care of many children in times of plagues and hunger after Emperor Shôtoku's reascension to the throne.<sup>804</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of the unfortunate events narrated in the edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769), both Kiyomaro and Hôkin lost the trust of the emperor and were punished. Nihon kôki reports an interesting fact in regard to Wake no Kiyomaro's exile to Ôsumi: apparently a member of the Fujiwara family supported him during that difficult time.

“于時參議右大辨藤原朝臣百川愍其忠烈。便割備後國封鄉廿戸。送充於配處。”<sup>805</sup>

*[Zu der Zeit hatte der Staatsrat (Sangi) und Ben zur Rechten Fujiwara no Ason Momokawa Mitgefühl mit der flammenden Treue Kiyomaro's, teilte von seiner eigenen Lehenslandschaft im Lande Bingo 20 Hausstande ab und sandte (die Einkünfte) ihm als Gabe an den Ort seiner Verbannung.]*<sup>806</sup>

Momokawa was son of Fujiwara no Umakai and rose to power in the later years of Emperor Shôtoku's reign. It is believed that he was one of the courtiers who supported the choice of Prince Shirakabe as Shôtoku's successor. One would probably wonder why a member of the most influential and respected family at court would have taken an interest in a low-ranking noble such as Kiyomaro who also had been unfortunate enough to bring the sovereign's wrath upon himself. The excuse that Momokawa was “impressed by Kiyomaro's loyalty toward the Throne” seems implausible, as by helping the one who had been sent into exile on the emperor's order, the Minister of the Right risked to make an enemy out of her. Therefore, it could be speculated that Momokawa and Wake no Kiyomaro had had much closer association than that between common courtiers. An indication of that could be found in the Nihon kôki chronicle from the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of Enryaku 18 (799).

“清麻呂之先、出自垂仁天皇皇子鐸石別命。三世孫弟彥王。從神功皇后征新羅、凱旋。明年忍熊別皇子有逆謀。皇后遣弟彥王。於針間・吉備塚山誅之。以從軍功。封藤原縣。因家焉。”<sup>807</sup>

*[Kiyomaro's Vorfahren stammen von Otohiko no kimi, der in dritter Generation Enkel war des Nudeshi Wake no Mikoto, des Kaiserlichen Sohnes Suinin Tennô's. Er (Otohiko) folgte Kaiserin Jingô auf dem Feldzuge gegen Silla. In dem Jahr nach dem Triumphe machte Kaiserprinz Oshikima Wake ein Komplott. Die Kaiserin entsandte Otohiko no kimi an die Grenzberge von*

<sup>804</sup> See 日本後紀 [Nihon kôki], Vol.8, 延曆 [Enryaku] 18.2.21; Nihon kôki, transl. by Bohner 1940: 267/268

<sup>805</sup> 日本後紀 [Nihon kôki], Vol.8, 延曆 [Enryaku] 18.2.21

<sup>806</sup> Nihon kôki, transl. by Bohner 1940: 270

<sup>807</sup> 日本後紀 [Nihon kôki], Vol.8, 延曆 [Enryaku] 18.2.21

*Harima-Kibi und liess ihn richten. Fur das Verdienst der Feldzugsgefolgschaft belehnte sie ihn mit dem Gau (agata) Fujiwara. Daher wohnte er daselbst.]*<sup>808</sup>

From that description, it could be seen that Kiyomaro's earliest ancestors were associated with the name Fujiwara. Apparently the territory (agata; 県) given to Otohiko no kimi as a reward for his help in the subjugation of Crown Prince Wake's rebellion was called Fujiwara. After that, Otohiko no kimi decided to settle there. According to Hermann Böhner, the Fujiwara district also happened to be the place where the ancestor of the Fujiwara clan Nakatomi no Kamatari was born.<sup>809</sup> The name of that district most likely influenced Emperor Tenji when he chose a name for the future most powerful noble family in the Nara and Heian periods. To summarize, Wake no Kiyomaro's earliest ancestor, Otohiko no kimi, was given the Fujiwara district as a reward. The said territory was also the place where the Fujiwara's ancestor Nakatomi no Kamatari was born. It could, therefore, be assumed that the home of both the Fujiwara and the Wake clan was the district Fujiwara, which bonded them to one another by means of their place of origin. Considering that, it could be speculated that the relationship between the two families didn't come to an end simply because the Wake remained low-ranked nobles settled in the province, while the Fujiwara rose to the highest position possible on the political scene. From that point of view, it wouldn't be difficult to understand both the reason for Fujiwara no Momokawa's decision to help the exiled Kiyomaro on the latter's way to Ôsumi, and Emperor Shôtoku's distrust of the siblings.

On the other hand, if the close relationship between the Wake and the Fujiwara truly existed, one could interpret Emperor Shôtoku's words that *"there are persons who were aware of this matter and conspired together with Kiyomaro and his group."* as an indication that the whole Dôkyô Incident was plotted by these two families. In the first place, the sentence *"It is not that other people reported that it was a falsehood, but that her own words greatly contravened reason."* shows that the emperor found the two contradicting oracles more than strange. The differences between the first and the second oracle led her to the conclusion that one of them was false. One will probably question Shôtoku's ability to assess the veracity of both oracles or the reason for her conviction that the second revelation reported by Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister had been the false one. The explanation comes in the second part of the senmyô where the sovereign explains that *"Furthermore, We have come to know that there are persons who were aware of this matter and conspired together with Kiyomaro and his group. [...] The matter now being clear, any persons who were of the same mind with Kiyomaro and his group, and even in one or two particulars conspired with him, shall rectify their hearts and henceforward serve clearly and correctly."* These sentences indicate that the emperor knew about a brewing conspiracy against her, possibly even before the Hachiman oracles were revealed. A proof of the plot's target could be found in the words *"...any persons [...] shall rectify their hearts and henceforward serve clearly and correctly."* At the same time, it seems that Emperor Shôtoku didn't have any solid evidence against the conspirators and thus decided to use the deities of Heaven and Earth to support her claim: *"Although people did not inform Us of this, it was Heaven and Earth that definitely revealed and indicated to me that her heart was evil, filthy and impure."* In any case, it seems that the sovereign was aware of a group of people who wanted to attack her through her monk minister. Despite some descriptions of Dôkyô as a cunning manipulator, he was not as politically adept as one could expect from a Prime Minister. Due to his vast knowledge in certain areas, he could at best be described as a scholar not as a politician, which would have made him the perfect target of the Fujiwara attack. To prove that, it would be enough to compare his and Emperor Shôtoku's reactions after hearing the second Hachiman oracle. Dôkyô became so furious that he even tried to get Wake

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<sup>808</sup> Nihon kôki, transl. by Böhner 1940: 271

<sup>809</sup> See Tôshi Kaden, Vol. 1, transl. by Böhner 1941: 207/245

no Kiyomaro killed. In contrast, Emperor Shôtoku turned against the duo Wake no Kiyomaro – Hôkin and spoke of conspiracy. As it could be seen, the monk simply directed his anger at the most obvious person, whereas Shôtoku first analysed the situation and eventually came to the conclusion that there was something much more complex lurking behind the whole story than a simple oracle.

Of course, one would oppose that if Dôkyô didn't have any political ambitions for the Imperial Throne, he would not have showed such obvious anger toward Wake no Kiyomaro. While there is no real evidence which could potentially prove it, it could be speculated that the monk's displeasure was caused by the false accusations against him. If the Imperial edicts narrating that Dôkyô did not actually seek any of his political appointments are supposedly true, then it could be assumed that he saw his political duties more as a burden than as a purpose in life. Moreover, there was still the possibility that the monk's anger at Wake no Kiyomaro was not the result of the latter preventing him from usurping the throne but rather of the groundless accusations against him. Anyway, regardless of the reasons for Dôkyô's reaction toward Wake no Kiyomaro, the decision to hold accountable the person who seemed directly involved in the incident and to completely ignore the possibility to analyse the whole event in detail shows the monk's lack of strategical thinking much needed in politics. In contrast to him, Emperor Shôkoku was as sharp as ever. Of course, she didn't forget to punish Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister, as they were the direct perpetrators after all, but she was also able to see behind the scene and to conclude that the brother-sister duo were simply tools in the hands of other people. She most certainly knew about the Fujiwara's envy of Dôkyô. After all, she was the one who tried to tie their hands by showering the monk with huge honors and high posts, and thus used him as a counterbalance to Fujiwara's political power. Surely enough, Emperor Shôtoku also knew about the possibility of a close association between the Wake and the Fujiwara clans. Even if the descent of the two families had been unknown at the time of the incident (which was highly unlikely), the sole fact that Fujiwara no Momokawa supported the exiled Kiyomaro on the latter's way to Ôsumi was proof enough that the two clans were somehow connected. From that point of view, it could be speculated that Shôtoku deliberately sent Wake no Kiyomaro as a special envoy to Usa, in an attempt to reveal the conspiracy against her.

A proof of that could be found in the short chronology of the events prior to Wake no Kiyomaro's return to the capital. According to Shoku Nihongi, Kiyomaro's family name was changed from Kibi Fujino Wake Mahito (吉備藤野和氣真人) to Fujino Mahito (輔治能真人) on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769).<sup>810</sup> The second "Fujino" means "*a person who is capable of assisting in politics*", thus indicating that Kiyomaro was considered an important asset for the court and the emperor. On the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, Kiyomaro's birth place, the Fujino district in the Buzen province, was renamed Wake district. In the meantime, many members of the Wake clan were given honorary names and titles.<sup>811</sup> All that was made in the short period of two months prior to Kiyomaro's departure for Usa and his return to the capital. Takinami Sadako explains Emperor Shôtoku's sudden interest in the Wake clan as her attempt to "*soften Kiyomaro's heart*" to Dôkyô in the hope of hearing a positive oracle after the courtier's return from Usa.<sup>812</sup> While such possibility could not be excluded, it seems unlikely that if Shôtoku really hoped to hear positive news regarding Dôkyô's potential appointment as her successor, she would have needed to send a second envoy to Usa. Instead of dispatching Wake no Kiyomaro to Usa and lavishing honors upon him and his clan, she could have simply "believed" the first oracle and acted on it. From that point of view, the possibility that the

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<sup>810</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.5.28

<sup>811</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.6.29 and 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.6.26

<sup>812</sup> See Takinami 1998: 181

emperor wanted to “bribe” Kiyomaro in an attempt to win him over seems unrealistic. Rather, the honors lavished upon Kiyomaro and his clan seem much more like a deliberate strategy with a certain goal: Shôtoku played the part of the naïve sovereign who blindly believed her subject and wanted to reward him for his loyalty and his readiness to depart for Usa without much preparation. That, combined with her edicts from the previous year in which the emperor emphasized her flaws and her concerns that she wasn’t virtuous enough for her position, should have served as the trigger for the conspirators who remained in the capital.

Considering that Emperor Shôtoku’s edict concerning the incident was issued in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 769, while her interest in the Wake clan had been growing since the 5<sup>th</sup> month, it could be assumed that the Dôkyô Incident took place somewhere between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 769. Takinami assumes that the first oracle was reported in the 5<sup>th</sup> month and Kiyomaro’s return and report to the sovereign happened in the 8<sup>th</sup> month. She bases her assumption on Engi Shiki reports (the volume about the taxation system (Shuzei Shiki; 主税式), in particular) about the distance between Heian-kyô and the province Buzen.<sup>813</sup> According to these records, the round trip by land from Heian-kyô to Buzen via Dazaifu took 44 days: 27 days to reach Dazaifu and 14 days on the return trip. At the same time, one needed only one or two days to cover the distance between Dazaifu and Buzen Province. The same stretch could be covered for 30 days if one used a ship. Of course, the reports give the distance between Buzen and Heian-kyô, but even if one had to depart from Heijô-kyô, the distance and the time needed to cover it would still have been extended for several days at most. Moreover, Engi shiki reported the distance necessary for one to cover after the collection of taxes. That meant that the tax collector(s) would have needed much more time and effort, depending on the luggage and the means of transportation, as well as the security measures taken against pirates or thieves. In contrast, Wake no Kiyomaro was not burdened in any similar way and could travel much faster. In short, if one takes into account the time he spent in Usa, he would have needed a month to make the round trip. It could be assumed that he was summoned before the emperor immediately after his return to the capital, which would mean that Kiyomaro departed for Usa somewhere in the 7<sup>th</sup> month of 769. The short period of merely 4 months was not enough for one to come up with such a complex plan and to set it into motion. From that point of view, it could be assumed that the plot was brewing even before the 5<sup>th</sup> month of 769, which could have given the conspirators enough time to build their defences and to prepare their offense, but which would have also allowed the emperor to get a grasp on the whole situation beforehand. By showering Wake no Kiyomaro and his clansmen with huge honors and political appointments, however, Shôtoku speeded up the process of revealing the true intentions of the conspirators.

As a matter of fact, that strategy of hers was well known. She had already used it during her first reign when she had to suppress the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. By creating the impression that she was a naïve and benevolent ruler who blindly supported Fujiwara no Nakamaro, she hoped that Naramaro would be provoked to attack the mansion of his political rival in which both she and the Crown Prince resided. The same strategy seemed to have been used by the emperor during the Dôkyô Incident. After Kiyomaro’s return, the courtier not only reported an oracle which was completely opposite to the first one but even dared to criticize the sovereign’s own decisions and authority. A proof of that could be seen in the opening sequence of the edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month: *“The one called a subject is one who follows his lord and assists and protects with a clear, correct and bright heart. The subject should face the sovereign without irreverence. Outside the Presence, the subject is one does not utter slanderous words, and is to serve without a treacherous, deceitful, obsequious or twisted heart.”* The “slanderous words” were surely pointed at Dôkyô. Since it was

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<sup>813</sup> See Takinami 1998: 183

Emperor Shôtoku who had appointed him to his current political position, however, it could be speculated that any words uttered against the monk minister could be interpreted as criticism of the sovereign herself. After all, it was she who had created a political world in which a Buddhist monk had been elevated to the second-highest position in state. If one criticized him, it was as if one criticized Imperial decisions and the emperor herself. Even if the siblings' original purpose was for Emperor Shôtoku to become so agitated by the news of the false oracle that she would want to get rid of Dôkyô, she understood their words as a denunciation of her instead: and that was something which could not be tolerated.

Anyway, thinking objectively, it seems highly unlikely that Emperor Shôtoku even considered the possibility of making Dôkyô her successor. Taking into account her own struggles after her designation as Crown Prince, her reluctance to abdicate in 758, the fiasco with Emperor Junnin, and eventually the constant pressure from the nobles to appoint an heir after her reascension to the throne, one could say that she had had enough bitter experiences to let herself be easily fooled into choosing someone simply because the others expected her to do so. Moreover, considering the various reasons for the deposition of Crown Prince Funado and the dethronement of Emperor Junnin, all of which eventually came down to one simple fact: that both men had not been connected with the Kusakabe line by blood, it could be assumed that the continuation of that branch of the Imperial family seemed of utmost importance for Emperor Shôtoku. In that train of thought, it seems unlikely that the last female emperor of Nara Japan would have readily jeopardized her own standards as well as her image as a filial daughter because of a monk of questionable descent, who prior to his entry into the political world had no political experience and even after that could not be described as the most politically astute person at court. The edicts concerning his political appointments often pictured Dôkyô as a man who didn't seek political positions or court ranks, and even if that had not been the case, that image of his had been already established and therefore hard to change. A person without political ambition would have surely felt out of his place on the Imperial throne and would have become an easy prey for the courtiers. Emperor Junnin had been an example of that. Moreover, a person who aspired to become emperor should have established his own political and military base. For the several years during which Dôkyô held the highest positions in state, he had been unable to get rid of his direct political opponents from the Fujiwara family and to replace them with his own supporters from the Yuge clan. His brother Kiyohito was the most notable exception. The sole fact that Fujiwara no Momokawa was powerful and fearless enough to help the exiled Wake no Kiyomaro on the latter's way to Ôsumi was proof enough that Dôkyô was not able to control the Fujiwara. From that point of view, it seems highly unlikely that Shôtoku thought about the possibility of appointing Dôkyô as her successor.

With all said, the "*slanderous words*" uttered by Kiyomaro and Hôkin were considered offensive simply because the brother and sister had not been loyal enough to believe in the decisions of their ruler. By assuming that she would give the throne to a monk, regardless of his capabilities and her trust in him, they showed lack of understanding of their sovereign and for that they had to be punished. As the criticism (and therefore the offense) was coated in such a way as to give the impression that all was pointed at Dôkyô, the emperor could not sentence the offenders to death. Therefore, she changed their names, sent Kiyomaro into exile and banished Hôkin from the capital. At the same time, the sovereign sent a direct warning to the conspirators who stood behind Kiyomaro and Hôkin: if they wanted to continue with their attempts to ruin her reputation and to cast doubt on her decisions, she was ready to accept the challenge.

Emperor Shôtoku's next edict after the Dôkyô Incident is that from the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769). It is rather long and in it, the emperor gave an explanation of the reasons for her actions during

the Incident, and recapitulated her reign until then. Similar to Emperor Shōmu before his death, she also instructed the courtiers how they should serve the sovereign and referred to the advices given to her by her father and Retired Emperor Genshō. Furthermore, she also urged the courtiers to stop conspirating and to serve the emperor diligently instead.<sup>814</sup> The most interesting part of the edict, however, is its last sequence where one could read:

“猶朕(我)尊(備)拜(美)誦誦(之)奉(留)最勝王經(乃)王法正論品(爾)命(久)。若造善惡業、今於現在中、諸天共護持、示其善惡報。国人造惡業。王者不禁制。此非順正理。治擯当如法(止)命(天)在。」<sup>815</sup>

*[In the passage on the Correct Law of the King in the Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings, which We read with deep veneration and worship, it declares:*

*'If a person performs good or evil acts, then in the present the various heavenly kings will together protect and uphold, demonstrating the reward for either doing good or evil. It goes against correct principles when the people of the land commit evil acts and the ruler fails to forbid the action. The punishment for infractions should be based on law.'* So the sutra proclaims.<sup>816</sup>

As it could be seen, in the last part of the proclamation, the teaching that those who do good things would be rewarded by the Heavens, while those who do bad things will be punished is emphasized. At the same time, it is pointed out that “*It goes against correct principles when the people of the land commit evil acts and the ruler fails to forbid the action.*” Thus, the emperor defended the punishments exacted on all those courtiers who plotted (“*commit[ed] evil acts*”) against her both during her first and her second reign. In her defence, she emphasized that “*The punishment for infractions should be based on law.*”, which can be interpreted as her way to say that she never sentenced people based on personal grudges or personal sentiments, but instead preferred to follow the law.

The last edict from the year Jingo keiun 3 (769), that from the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, comes as a continuation of the sutra’s teaching that “*If a person performs good or evil acts, then in the present the various heavenly kings will together protect and uphold, demonstrating the reward for either doing good or evil.*”

“【S 4 6】今勅(久)。今日(方)新嘗(乃)猶良比(乃)豐(乃)明聞(許之壳須)日(仁)在。然昨日(能)冬至日(仁)、天雨(天)地(毛)潤、万物(毛)萌毛延始(天)、好(阿流良牟止)念(仁)。伊予国(与利)白祥鹿(乎)獻奉(天)在(礼方)、有礼(志)与呂許保(志止奈毛)見(流)。復三(乃)善事(乃)同時(仁)集(天)在(己止)、甚希有(止)念畏(末利)尊(備)、諸臣等(止)共(仁)異奇(久)麗白(伎)形(乎奈毛)見喜(流)。故是以、黒記白記(乃)御酒食(倍)惠良(伎)。常(毛)賜酒幣(乃)物賜(礼止之天)御物給(波久止)宣。」<sup>817</sup>

*[At the present time the Empress decrees: Today is the day when We partake of the Copious Brightness of the Grand Banquet of the Great Thanksgiving Festival. Now yesterday being the*

<sup>814</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.10 【S 4 5】; Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 69/73

<sup>815</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.10 【S 4 5】

<sup>816</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 72

<sup>817</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.11.28

winter solstice, rain fell, the earth was moist and the ten thousand things began to sprout and flourish – thus we already considered it auspicious. Then from the province of Iyo the auspicious sign of a white deer was presented, and We viewed it with joy and gladness.

Further, We consider it as extraordinarily marvelous and wonderful that these three good things have come together at the same time. Together with all the ministers We looked and rejoiced at the awe-inspiring beautiful white form of the deer. Consequently as you consume and enjoy the wines of black and white, We grant you the banquet gifts which we always grant. Thus We decree.]<sup>818</sup>

Exactly on the day before the Niiname-sai, several auspicious signs were revealed: it was the winter solstice, it rained, and “ten thousand things began to sprout and flourish”. Moreover, a white deer from the province Iyo was presented to the emperor. The edict could be interpreted as Shôtoku’s way to say that her political decisions so far had been right and, more importantly, sanctioned as such by the indigenous deities. The fact that they decided to make their opinion known before the Niiname-sai, a ceremony which is also part of the enthronement ceremony of a ruler, could be understood as their acknowledgement of Emperor Shôtoku as the rightful ruler of the realm.

Emperor Shôtoku’s only edict from the year 770 is actually her last proclamation and, as one could expect, it addresses the succession issue.

“【S 4 7】今詔(久)。事卒爾(爾)有依(天)、諸臣等議(天)。白壁王(波)諸王(乃)中(爾)年齒(毛)長(奈利)。又先帝(乃)功(毛)在故(爾)、太子(止)定(天)、奏(波)奏(流麻爾麻)定給(布止)勅(久止)宣。」<sup>819</sup>

[At the present time what the Empress decrees: We now proclaim, due to the urgency of the matter, since all the ministers deliberating together have determined that, as among all the princes Prince Shirakabe is the oldest and also that he has the merit of his grandfather Emperor Tenji he should be designated the heir. The ministers have reported to this to Us, and so We accordingly proclaim Shirakabe the Crown Prince.]<sup>820</sup>

Considering the matter it addresses, the edict has a very unusual construction. It lacks opening sequences and the “flowery” introductions which could be found in many of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku’s proclamations. Moreover, the overall impression is created that the senmyô was issued shortly before the emperor’s death: “due to the urgency of the matter”. Furthermore, the words which follow after that emphasize the truth that Emperor Shôtoku had never really been in a hurry to appoint a successor, and she would never have let herself be manipulated and influenced by her ministers on the matter if she had had the chance to do so. Obviously, however, the current situation was not one which the emperor could control and therefore “the ministers deliberating together have determined that”. Apparently Prince Shirakabe had not been chosen by Emperor Shôtoku but rather by the courtiers. Moreover, as the edict explains, the Prince had been a descendant of Emperor Tenji, not of Emperor Tenmu. For the woman who was proud of her descent, such a decision could not have come naturally. The fact that the appointment of Prince Shirakabe to the position of Crown Prince was not supported by the sighting of any auspicious omens could be interpreted as a proof that the choice was not one willingly made by the emperor but that it was rather imposed on her by her courtiers. For Shôtoku, the appointment of a Crown Prince from the Tenji line meant that she would put an end to the Kusakabe

<sup>818</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 74

<sup>819</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝龜 [Hôki] 1.8.4

<sup>820</sup> Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 75

(Tenmu) line with her own hands. She, whose purpose had been to preserve the line, would have eventually become the one who would destroy it. From that point of view, it could be speculated that Prince Shirakabe's appointment was either forced on the emperor or forged in her name after her death. Moreover, Shoku Nihongi's chronicle that reports Emperor Shôtoku's death is dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Hôki 1 (770)<sup>821</sup>, that is four days after she supposedly proclaimed her last edict. Considering the fact that she died so soon after her last senmyô, it could be assumed that she had been on her deathbed at the time of its proclamation. It seems highly unlikely that a person in so serious condition could have taken care of state matters of such magnitude. Even if it had been Emperor Shôtoku who actually proclaimed the edict, it seems unlikely for her to have appointed a Crown Prince from the Tenji line. Therefore, it could be concluded that Emperor Shôtoku's last edict simply expressed the will of the ministers and not hers. Thus, an end was put to the Kusakabe line of the Imperial family, with the last member of the line also having been the last female ruler of Nara Japan.

All in all, the original Shoku Nihongi chronicles showed that Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was not depicted in a bad light by her contemporaries. She was presented as a capable ruler who, despite the social limitations placed on her by society due to her gender, could hold her ground against the male courtiers and her political enemies. That opinion could be reconfirmed after the analysis of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's Imperial edicts. In them, one sees an intelligent woman and a cunning politician who deliberately created as many faces as she wanted, depending on the time and the situation. At first, she had been the naïve and benevolent ruler who had been eventually betrayed by her own courtiers. After the Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy was revealed, however, that mask was not needed anymore and was thus casted aside. Instead, Emperor Kôken put on the disguise of the uncompromising and harsh ruler who was ready to take action against those who attacked her first. Unclear in regard to her intentions and thoughts remains the year of Emperor Kôken's abdication in favor of the future Emperor Junnin. As it was discussed, it seems unlikely that Empress Dowager Kômyôshi's poor health had been the only reason for Kôken's decision to step down from the throne. Since there are no other explanations given in her last edict as a sitting sovereign, however, one could only speculate about the possibility that Fujiwara no Nakamaro had pressured her into abdicating in favor of Crown Prince Ôi. Nevertheless, the years to follow showed the strong character of the Retired Emperor. The constant pressure exerted by Junnin, Nakamaro, and even her own mother, could not break her. She continued to fight against her political enemies even after her mother's death in 760 when she was surrounded on all sides. At the time, it was probably the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who happened to be her only support. But even one person was enough for the Retired Emperor to be able to find the inner strength to oppose Junnin and Nakamaro. After her reascension to the throne, Emperor Shôtoku put on a new mask: that of the decisive and ruthless sovereign who would punish her enemies without hesitation. Then, the role of Dôkyô was defined as the one person who would remind the emperor of her "humanity". However, the image of an unforgiving ruler was not enough to justify the reascension of a woman who also happened to be the one who dethroned the previous emperor. Then, the image of the cunning politician was created. Emperor Shôtoku utilized Dôkyô and his brother Kiyohito as a counterbalance to Fujiwara's influence and thus managed to strengthen her own position. At the same time, she independently assumed the role of a ruler who relied on auspicious omens as a justification tool for her political decisions, and thus deliberately showed her enemies a weakness which they potentially could exploit. They eventually made their move in 769 when first the emperor's half sister Fuwa was accused of plotting against her and casting magic in order to put her own son on the throne, and then the infamous Dôkyô Incident was revealed in which

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<sup>821</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.8.8



the monk minister supposedly tried to usurp the throne by relying on an oracle proclaimed by the deity Hachiman. While in the first case the persons involved were swiftly punished by the emperor, the second incident proved much harder to solve. Surprisingly enough, Shôtoku didn't punish the monk who had been accused of treason but rather the persons who reported his "schemes" to her. She revealed that the whole incident had been a plot against her, most likely planned and executed by the Fujiwara family. Thus, the year Jingo keiun 3 (769) remained the most eventful one from the reign of Emperor Shôtoku. Then, her last proclamation from the year 770 served to prove that it was eventually not her political opponents but rather her health which was able to defeat her. By appointing a Crown Prince from the Tenji line of the Imperial House and using Emperor Shôtoku's name to support the said choice, the courtiers eventually presented the last female ruler of Nara Japan as the unfilial descendant of Prince Kusakabe who put an end to his line with her own hands. All that serves to prove that the initial positive image of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku created by the original Shoku Nihongi chronicles and reconfirmed by the sovereign's own edicts began to change for the worse shortly before, or immediately after, her death. What should be noted here, however, is rather the fact that her own courtiers – men who lived in the shadow of a strong woman and who were most likely dissatisfied with that reality – played a significant part in that negative development.

### Manyôshû: Emperor Kôken's poetic side

Manyôshû (万葉集, literally „Collection of a Myriad Leaves“) is the oldest Japanese anthology. It consists of 20 books and contains more than 4000 poems, the manner of classification and arrangement of which set the standard for later imperial anthologies. It would be extremely difficult for one to point a certain time at which the Manyôshû was compiled due to the vast number of pieces, but, as Donald Keene points out, it could be *“safely said that the collection came into being some time during the late Nara period – the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century”*<sup>822</sup>. According to Keene,

“Most likely a few of them [*books*] were compiled early in the century, which served as a nucleus to which were added later – at least on two different occasions-the remaining books, while the entire collection was subjected to revision at frequent intervals before the Anthology assumed its present form.”<sup>823</sup>

Although Ôtomo no Yakamochi is generally regarded as the last one in a long series of compilers, there were many poets whose pieces found their place in the anthology. That fact is probably partly responsible for the lack of a clear selection system and a specific theme of the poems. The inspiration for the works came from all different places. For example, the old histories such as Kojiki and Nihonshoki are mentioned in the anthology, but there are also miscellaneous papers, memoirs and diaries which are pointed out as sources. Last but not least, many poems, which were otherwise transmitted only orally, were written down and preserved in the Manyôshû. As Donald Keene points out,

“It embraces and harmonizes both patrician and plebeian elements, and reveals the brilliance of city life by side with the charm of the country-side. It forms a happy contrast that many sovereigns and members of the imperial family are represented in the Anthology, together with a great number of excellent works by humble and nameless poets. That no less than 300 poems in the rude dialect of eastern Japan should be grouped together at two different places, is an unparalleled phenomenon in the ancient anthologies of the Orient. These provincial poems consist not only of occasional and extempore pieces, but of what appear to be the then

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<sup>822</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xvi

<sup>823</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xvi

current folk-songs, altered or recast in the course of transmission from place to place; and there may also well be a few by city poets who composed them in imitation of the rustic style. It is to be noted that the strain of folk-song is also frequently encountered in the works, especially in the amatory verse, of some urban singers. In addition there are some ballad-like poems dealing with legendary stories, and a small number of humorous pieces, which will not escape the reader's notice. It should be added that the Manyôshû boasts a number of women poets representing various strata of society from the highest to the humblest.

[...] Evidence is scattered throughout the Anthology of the efforts of the compilers to gather material from books and fragmentary documents, and other available sources, both public and private, old and new. In some cases the compiler gives, together with a poem, its original source, reference matter, or even his personal opinion of the poem itself. Because the task of compilation was not completed, the Anthology contains here and there indications of the process of selection and the traces of the conscientious labours of the compilers, which constitute a unique and interesting feature not found in the later anthologies.”<sup>824</sup>

The anthology has a simple and clear composition. A single poem or a group of poems is always preceded by the name of the author and a preface which is in many cases followed by a note. In the prefaces and notes, the occasion, the date and place of composition, the source or the manner of transmission, or anecdotes or legends concerning the authors are given. Sometimes one could also find the author's criticism or comments there. All the prefaces and notes are written in Chinese, whereas all poems are transcribed in Chinese characters borrowed for their phonetic value or used ideographically in their original meaning. Sometimes the first method was employed exclusively when copying a poem, but more often the two methods were used simulatenously – a practice which more or less created difficulties in the deciphering and understanding of the poems in later ages.<sup>825</sup>

The most prevalent metrical system in the Manyôshû is the tanka – a verse of five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. The so-called “long poem”, or chôka, that alternates between 5- and 7-syllables lines and finishes with an extra 7-syllable line is also represented, albeit with only some 260 pieces, the longest of which does not exceed 150 lines. The chôka is accompanied by one or two, or even several short poems called hanka (meaning “verse that repeats”) which summarize, supplement, or elaborate on the contents of the main poem. Among the 20 books of Manyôshû there is another metre to be found, albeit poorly represented with only around 60 pieces – the one called sedôka which repeats twice a tercet of 5-7-7. Also, an original Manyôshû-only metrical system called “Buddha's Foot Stone Poem” had found a place in the anthology. As Keene explains,

“...there are extant 21 poems of this type commemorating a stone monument bearing: Buddha's foot-mark, which was erected in 752 in the precincts of the Yakushi-ji temple near Nara. The poem consists of 6 lines of 5-7-5-7-7-7 syllables, and only a few specimens are found in the Manyôshû.”<sup>826</sup>

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<sup>824</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xiii/xvii

<sup>825</sup> According to Keene: “Besides the above two methods, Chinese characters were frequently used in playful and fantastic combinations like puzzles, to denote syllables or words. The problems arising from the difficulty of deciphering them in the last-mentioned instances, and more often from uncertainty as to the exact reading of the characters used ideographically, have been gradually solved in subsequent ages, but there remain certain words and passages of which the reading is still disputed among specialists.”, Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xviii

<sup>826</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xx

The final metre to be found is that of renga (“poems-in-series”) which became popular much later (14<sup>th</sup> century and later), and in the composition of which several persons participated.

It should not be forgotten that “*Behind the Manyôshû there looms the epochal Reform of Taika (646), which brought in its train, in rapid succession, a series of political and social changes, progressive and reactionary.*”<sup>827</sup> As Keene points out, to an extent that period could be called, and rightfully so, the “*age of imitation of China under the Sui and the T’ang dynasties*”.<sup>828</sup> At the same time, while it had been true that Japan learned from the continent not only in areas such as law and government but also in matters concerning religion and culture, it could be argued whether the speedy utilization of Chinese knowledge could be called an “imitation”. New elements were only then adopted when one made sure that they would fit in the Japanese society and culture. Many innovations were thus introduced only to be changed later, and some were simply not implemented in Japan due to their large deviation from the traditional ways of the island country. In sum, Manyôshû could be considered a mirror of the changes and the introduction of new knowledge, as well as the views of various people on these matters. For example, the first two books cover poems from the reigns of the emperors Yûryaku (r. 456 – 479) and Nintoku (r. 313 – 399) and contain the so-called “Early Palace Style”-poetry. In contrast, while book 3 covers the interval between the reign of Emperor Suiko (r. 592 – 628) and the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Tenpyô (744), it contains much less poems compiled by sovereigns, princes and princesses and much more works created by courtiers. Despite those differences, the first three books are still similar to each other due to the political background of the poets. In contrast, the themes and the authors’ background drastically change in Book 4. In it, there are mainly poems by Ôtomo no Yakamochi who supposedly exchanged them with his lady-loves. Reading further, in Book 5, one finds several important chôka, as well as verse and prose in Chinese. As it could be seen from the short presentation of the first five books of Manyôshû, the circumstances, the compilation, the themes and the authorship of the poems vary strongly from one book to another. While each book could stand independently, the impression is created that all volumes of the Manyôshû complement each other to the point that the end result is a mirror of the life as one had seen it at the time of the poems’ compilation.

Anyway, among the 20 books of the Manyôshû, the books 17 to 20 would be of interest for the current work, as it is in book 19 where two poems compiled by Emperor Kôken could be found. As Donald Keene points out,

“These 3 books contain altogether 47 chôka, some of which are of great literary and historical value. It should be noted that the works of Yakamochi constitute the principal contents of these books-especially Book XIX, of which fully two-thirds of the poems are his; and while there are numerous exchange and banquet poems in the conventional vein, there are also found many born of pure creative impulse. It is this book which contains the majority of Yakamochi's masterpieces, and provides the richest source for the study of his poetic genius.”<sup>829</sup>

Considering that “*It is this book which contains the majority of Yakamochi's masterpieces*”, it could be assumed that for poems to be included in that book, they should have been outstanding in their composition and expression. From that point of view, the fact that it is namely in book 19 where the two poems of Emperor Kôken could be found only increases their value. The first work (under the number of 4264) is a chôka supplemented by a hanka (under number 4265). According to the preface,

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<sup>827</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xxvii

<sup>828</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xxix

<sup>829</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: xxvi

Fujiwara no Kiyokawa, ambassador to China, was granted the poem together with food and drink delivered to Naniwa by Koma no Fukushin of the Lower Fourth Rank Senior.<sup>830</sup>

“虚見都 山跡乃國波 水上波 地往如久 船上波 床座如 大神乃 鎮在國曾 四舶 々能  
倍奈良倍 平安 早渡来而 還事 奏日尔 相飲酒曾 <斯>豊御酒者

四舶 早還来等 白香著 朕裳裙尔 鎮而將待”<sup>831</sup>

“The spacious Land of Yamato

Is a land guarded by the gods;

You go upon the waters

As upon the land;

You sit in the ship

As on the floor at home.

In your four ships, prow by prow,

You travel in safety,

Return in haste,

Then make your reports;

On that day we will take this wine –

This bounteous wine.

*Envoy*

That your four ships may soon come back

I pray to the gods,

Tying white hemp

To my skirt.”<sup>832</sup>

According to Shoku Nihongi, Fujiwara Ason no Kiyokawa was appointed envoy to Tang China on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 2 (750), with Ôtomo Sukune no Komaro having been a vice envoy.<sup>833</sup> Kiyokawa was the fourth son of Fusasaki, the second son of Fujiwara no Fuhito and one of the four Fujiwara brothers who died in the smallpox epidemic from 737. He was considered an asset for Emperor Kôken’s court and was appointed sangi. From that point of view, it should be no wonder that namely Kiyokawa was entrusted with the important duty of an envoy to China and given the leadership of the four ships in the delegation. Considering the significance of the mission, it could be assumed that the poem expresses the emperor’s good wishes for safe journey. That impression is only

<sup>830</sup> See 万葉集 [Manyôshû] Vol.19: 19/4264; Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: 83

<sup>831</sup> 万葉集 [Manyôshû] Vol. 19: 19/4264 and 19/4265

<sup>832</sup> Manyôshû, transl. by Keene 1965: 83

<sup>833</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 2.9.24

strengthened after reading the last three verses of the hanka. According to Keene, in ancient times, it was believed that the woman's skirt possessed magic powers.<sup>834</sup> Eventually, the journey turned out to have been more than successful. One of the four ships secretly brought the monk Jianzhen to Japan and it was he who ordained Retired Emperor Shōmu and Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi.

Anyway, while the poem's background is interesting, its composition is even more so. The two opening verses of the chōka introduce the theme also frequently found in the Imperial edicts of Shoku Nihongi: that of Japan's uniqueness as a land protected by the gods. As it could be seen, even in her poems, Emperor Kōken remained true to her identity as a ruler proud to reign over that chosen realm. At the same time, the closing two verses of the hanka that introduce the theme of the magical properties of a woman's skirt could also be interpreted as a reference to the semi-godly status of the emperor and his role as the high priest of the indigenous religion. In ancient times, it was believed that the shamans had magical abilities which enabled them to communicate with the otherworld, the deities and the ancestors. From that point of view, the last two verses could be interpreted as Emperor Kōken's way to remind the envoys that she held the special position of a high priest of the indigenous religion.

The second poem was composed after Emperor Kōken's arrival at Fujiwara no Nakamaro's Tamura no miya on 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 1 (757) together with her mother Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi.

“此里者 繼而霜哉置 夏野尔 吾見之草波 毛美知多里家利”<sup>835</sup>

“In this village  
Is there always frost?  
In the summer fields  
I saw the grasses  
Tinged with autumn”<sup>836</sup>

According to the preface of the poem, the emperor prepared a colorful swamp orchid as a gift for Fujiwara no Nakamaro.<sup>837</sup> The swamp orchid is a plant that grows in damp places and has purplish flowers. Considering that purple had been the color used exclusively by the emperor, one could assume the hidden meaning behind Kōken's gift. She wanted to emphasize that after her arrival, Nakamaro's estate was not simply the home of a courtier anymore but the temporary residence of the sovereign. That meant that any action against the villa could be interpreted as an attack against the ruler of the country. Considering that Tachibana no Naramaro's plans to surround the estate, to kill Nakamaro and to force Crown Prince Ōi to abdicate were revealed shortly thereafter, one could speculate that Emperor Kōken's words had been prophetic. Unfortunately for Naramaro, he either did not hear about the poem and the gift for Nakamaro or simply dismissed it as an empty threat. Furthermore, there is certainly a deeper meaning to be found behind the poem's last word. Autumn, similar to spring, is a transitional season, a time during which the nature prepares itself for the changes about to occur in winter and summer, respectively. In contrast to summer, however, autumn is a time for endurance, a period during which one has to strengthen oneself for the hardships to come. Only after those trials are overcome can spring and summer come and the nature can shine in its full beauty. In that train of

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<sup>834</sup> See Manyōshū, transl. by Keene 1965: 83

<sup>835</sup> 万葉集 [Manyōshū] Vol.19: 19/4268

<sup>836</sup> Takagi 2018: 205

<sup>837</sup> See 万葉集 [Manyōshū] Vol.19: 19/4268

thought, it could be assumed that the emperor saw her stay at Tamura no miya as a transitional period for her reign, as a turning point after which she, and probably also the country, would undergo a drastic change. Considering that after Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy, the emperor decided to abandon the mask of a naïve and benevolent ruler, one could regard Kôken's words as prophetic, or simply as strategic. Seeing how she took care of the conspirators and how mainly members of the Imperial family were punished due to their active participation in Naramaro's plot, it could be speculated that Kôken wanted to remove all potential threats for her position by utilizing a conspiracy which could have or could not have been planned by Tachibana no Naramaro. Even if there was even the smallest possibility of the plot having been directed by Emperor Kôken, then the word "autumn" comes as an indirect warning to her enemies.

In sum, Emperor Kôken's poems describe her as a person well versed in literature who knew how to use words and their hidden meanings. At the same time, as one could see from both pieces, she never forgot her position as an emperor. Kôken expressed herself with dignity and found ways to demonstrate her sense of pride in being a ruler of the land chosen by the gods. At the same time, her poems portray a smart and strong woman who would not let herself be easily deceived or attacked by others.

### Nihon ryôiki: a critical description of Emperor Shôtoku

After the self-portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in the oldest and biggest anthology of Japan was discussed, it is now time to turn to another genre of the Japanese literature – the setsuwa. Although the literal meaning of "setsuwa" (説話) is "spoken story", the term is often translated also as "hearsay" or "gossip talk". The "gossip talks" were very popular in early Japan, especially in the Heian and Kamakura periods (794-1185/1192-1333, respectively), as they helped the ordinary people to find "human" characteristics in the political or religious elite of the land. It is believed that the name of that prosaic genre of the Japanese literature originated from the form in which people spread stories about the popular people from their times, namely through hearsay or gossip. After the establishment of the Buddhist temples as reservoirs for knowledge, many such stories were written down by monks, which set the beginning of a whole new genre in the Japanese literature. The themes of the setsuwa vary largely. Some of these stories narrate religious or even supernatural events, for example miracles. Others recount secular episodes based loosely on historical facts and figures and, in the manner of the European fables, deliver moral sermons on the conduct of people in their everyday life. Namely the latter became the basis for the oldest Japanese setsuwa collection Nihon ryôiki. Compiled by the Buddhist monk Kyôkai between 787 and 824, the collection takes a middle position between the Nara and Heian periods of Japanese history. Since the stories to be analyzed, however, tell about persons who lived during the Nara period, it would be better to analyze Nihon ryôiki in the current chapter of the work and to use it as a bridge between the sources from the Nara period and those from the Heian period that will be discussed immediately thereafter.

As Kyoko Motomichi Nakamura points out, "*The Nihon ryôiki is a product of the Buddhist tradition as it took root in Japanese soil.*"<sup>838</sup>, thus proving the point mentioned in the previous paragraph in regard to the circumstances behind the compilation and themes of the setsuwa stories. Its author, monk Kyôkai (景戒), was a low-ranked Buddhist monk who served at Yakushiji Temple.<sup>839</sup> According to the „Biographies of Eminent Monks in Japan“ (本朝高僧伝; Honchô kôsôden), Kyôkai's teachings were based on the Yuishiki school of thought, or the so-called doctrine of "Consciousness-Only" (Yogachara)

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<sup>838</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: Translator's Preface

<sup>839</sup> See Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [3]

– a Buddhist philosophy which centers on meditation as a comprehensive and therapeutic framework for one who strives to attain enlightenment.<sup>840</sup> However, Nakamura argues that it is unlikely that the monk was strongly (if at all) influenced by the said doctrine. She supports her claim with the argument that during Kyôkai's lifetime, the sectarian administrative structure was still in the first stages of its development. Therefore, the temples at the time could rather be considered Buddhist institutes for studying different schools of thought than as places strictly affiliated with only one doctrine. From that point of view, it is absolutely possible that Kyôkai witnessed sectarian consciousness growing among the monks at Yakushiji Temple, but it is highly unlikely that he was influenced by a single doctrine which later became the basis for his teachings. Moreover, according to Nakamura, the monk seems to have been interested in the new doctrines, only insofar as he studied their views on happiness and the ways of its achievement<sup>841</sup>, which further supports the theory that he could not have been affiliated with only a single school of thought. As it becomes clear from the analysis of *Nihon Ryôiki*, the autobiographical sections of the *setsuwa* collection (the three prefaces at the beginning of each volume and the postscript at the end of the third volume) remain the only reliable sources of information about Kyôkai's life. Nakamura's attempt to systematize the information turns out as follows:

“In the second half of Tale 38, the following dated events are mentioned:

One autumn evening in 787 Kyôkai reflected on his poverty-stricken life filled with cravings and burning desires, and lamented his past karma. He sighed with remorse, dozed off, and dreamed what he took to be a revelation from the Buddha. In the dream he was called on by a mendicant named Kyônichi. The mendicant showed him a huge flat board on which were marked the heights of several men, their stature being indicative of their relative merits. According to Kyôkai's interpretation, the mendicant was none other than an embodiment of Kannon 観音, who had come to teach him that man possesses the Buddha-nature, and that, by adding to it wisdom and practice, he can erase past karma and thereby gain happiness. The mendicant, whose begging was an expression of the great mercy of Kannon, gave him an anthology of Buddhist scriptures in order that he might cultivate wisdom, and then disappeared.

In the following year Kyôkai had a second mysterious dream in which he died and was cremated while his spirit observed the whole procedure as an onlooker. Kyôkai did not interpret this dream, but simply remarked that it might be an omen indicating the attainment of long life or a particular rank since dreams sometimes depict the opposite of what is to follow. We do not know whether he lived a long life, but eventually, in 795, he was honored with the second lowest clerical rank.<sup>842</sup>

Based on that, the author comes to the conclusion that the monk was tonsured somewhere between 787 and 795, perhaps near the time of his second dream in 788, because several years had to have been passed for him to be able to receive the second lowest rank. The fact that there is no information about the circumstances around Kyôkai's entry into priesthood contrasts with the detailed reports about his dreams. That could be probably attributed to his belief that his personal details would be of no interest to the people. Therefore, he purposefully chose to narrate the dreams that in all likelihood influenced his decision to become a monk. The first dream seems to have showed him the way to “enlightenment”, as it widened his vision from a self-centered love to universal one toward any living

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<sup>840</sup> See Lusthaus 2014

<sup>841</sup> See *Nihon ryôiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [4]

<sup>842</sup> *Nihon ryôiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [4]/[5]

thing. As a result, Kannon taught him how the principle of karma worked. It seems that for Kyōkai the spiritual life as a monk was a way to seek happier life and thus to attain enlightenment. As Nakamura points out,

“Aspire to wisdom, and guide all sentient beings” is an important Mahayana Buddhist maxim which Kyōkai espoused. It was believed that enlightenment could be attained by devotion to Buddha and mercy for all fellow beings. Thus, he brought together the tales of the Nihon ryōiki as a step toward such enlightenment:

By editing these stories of miraculous events I want to pull people forward by the ears, offer my hand to lead them to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil. My sincere hope is that we may all be reborn in the western land of bliss, leaving no one on the earth, and live together in the jeweled palace in heaven, abandoning our earthly residence [III.Preface].<sup>843</sup>

At the time during which Kyōkai lived at Yakushiji Temple, state control over Buddhism and its clergy had become significantly tighter. Emperor Kōnin (r. 770 – 781), Emperor Shōtoku’s successor on the throne, exiled Dōkyō on the pretext that the latter tried to usurp the throne using a false oracle from the deity Hachiman of Usa. Kōnin’s successor, Emperor Kanmu (r. 781 – 806), transferred the capital from Nara to Kyōto in an attempt to sever the ties between the traditional temples at Nara and the Imperial court. During the twenty-five years of his reign, Kanmu issued more than fifty Imperial edicts concerning Buddhist temples and monks. Among those, thirty edicts pointed out the clergy’s mistakes and offered advice on how to correct them. All things considered, it could be concluded that Kyōkai used Nihon ryōiki as a way to sway people’s hearts toward the right way of life. In that sense, the stories to be found in the setsuwa collection had the purpose of showing good and bad deeds, as well as the moral standards by which one should abide if one aspired to attain enlightenment.

Considering that Nihon ryōiki was the first work of its kind to have been compiled in Japan, it could be surmised that Kyōkai used other sources as references. As Nakamura points out, the monk himself had his own work principles during the compilation of his work:

“My work is comparable to a rough pebble .... Its source in the oral tradition is so indistinct that I am afraid of omitting much [I. Preface].

However, I cannot suppress my passion to do good, so I dare to write down oral traditions [at the risk of] soiling clean paper with mistakes [II. Preface].

According to what I had heard, I selected oral traditions and put down miraculous events, dividing them into good and evil [III. 39, Postscript].<sup>844</sup>

From the last sentence, it becomes clear that monk Kyōkai relied not only on written but also on unwritten, that is oral, sources during the compilation of his work. Speaking of written sources, Nakamura also surmises that he had used a list of Chinese Buddhist literature which could be divided into two groups: anthologies of scriptures and biographies edited by monks, and legends collected by lay Buddhists.<sup>845</sup> However, in some places in his work, Kyōkai seems to have used quotations that are not faithful to the original texts, a fact which suggests that he relied too little on the actual sources. Therefore, it could be assumed that the monk rather tried to combine the two groups named by Nakamura into one and thus to create something innovative with the clear purpose of teaching the

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<sup>843</sup> Nihon ryōiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [6]/[7]

<sup>844</sup> Nihon ryōiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [34]/[35]

<sup>845</sup> See Nihon ryōiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [35]



people to recognize good and bad. From that point of view, Nihon ryōiki could be regarded as a simple monk's attempt to utilize the Chinese written tradition in order to create an original Japanese work, the contents of which came from the common people and were meant for them in a way in which they could come to know the political figures at the top of the state better and could learn from their mistakes and good deeds. Therefore, Nihon ryōiki's stories could in no way be seen as Kyōkai's way to criticize the court and the nobility, but rather as a mirror which reflected the public opinion on a certain matter.

In that train of thought, the critical view on the relationship between Emperor Shōtoku and Dōkyō should not be surprising. Emperor Kanmu, the emperor who sat on the throne at the time of Nihon ryōiki's compilation, had been a descendant of Emperor Tenji through his father Prince Shirakabe, later Emperor Kōnin. As Emperor Shōtoku belonged to the "opposite" Tenmu branch of the Imperial line, one could surmise that there certainly had been negative sentiments toward her. Although these were not expressed in official histories such as Shoku Nihongi, it had been a fact that the enthronement of Prince Shirakabe as Emperor Kōnin in 770 after Emperor Shōtoku's death put an end to the Kusakabe's (Tenmu's) line hold on the Imperial throne. From a commoner's point of view, there surely were tensions between the two branches of the Imperial House. At the same time, according to Kyōkai's own views, there was a reason for one's happiness as well as for one's unhappiness. In that train of thought, there surely had been a reason for the discontinuation of the Kusakabe (Tenmu) line of the Imperial House. The end result of these reflections was Tale 38 of the third volume of Nihon ryōiki named "On the Appearance of Good and Evil Omens Which Were Later followed by Their Results" in which, among other things, one finds a description of the common people's opinion on Emperor Shōtoku's and Dōkyō's relationship:

“又同太后坐時,舉天下國而歌詠言:

乎 曾  
法師等を裙著輕侮 曾 之中要帶薦槌懸 彌發時時 畏卿耶

又詠言:

見曾比多爾 幣 麻弓  
我之黒みそひ股宿給へ 人成まで

如是歌詠.帝姬阿倍天皇御世之天平神護元年歲次乙巳年始,弓削氏僧-道鏡法師,與皇后同枕交通,天下政相攝,治天下.彼詠歌者,是道鏡法師之與皇后同枕交通,天下政攝表答也.

又同太后時,詠言:

正相木本者 大德食肥而立來也

如是詠言.是當知,同時道鏡法師以為法皇,鴨氏僧韻興法師以為法臣參議,而天下政攝表答也.<sup>846</sup>

[Also in the reign of the empress dowager there was a song which circulated among the people in the country:

*Don't be contemptuous of monks because of their robes.*

<sup>846</sup> 日本靈異記 [Nihon ryōiki]: 38

*For under their skirts are hung garters and hammers.*

*When the hammers erect themselves,*

*The monks turn out to be awesome lords.*

*Or, there was another song that went like this:*

*Lie down along*

*The dark valley of my thighs*

*Till you become a man.*

*In the reign of Empress Abe, in the beginning of the second year of the snake, the first year of the Tenpyô jingo era, Dharma Master Dôkyô 道鏡 of the Yuge 弓削 family had intercourse with the empress on the same pillow, hearing the affairs of state and ruling over the country together. The above songs were prediction of his relations with the empress and his control over state affairs.*

*Also in the reign of the empress dowager, there was a song that went like this:*

*Look straight at the root of the tree,*

*And you will find the most venerable master*

*Standing satiated and fat.*

*It is evident this was a prediction of the participation in state affairs of Dharma Master Dôkyô as Dharma King 法皇案 Dharma Master Ingô 韻興 of the Kamo 鴨 family as a spiritual councilor.]<sup>847</sup>*

The songs supposedly sung by the common people certainly hold a hidden meaning. For example, the phrase “*For under their skirts are hung garters and hammers*” refers to both a monk’s political involvement and his love affairs. Thus, the song could be interpreted as an allusion to the intimate relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô. The same could be said about the second song which directly refers to the sexual act between a man and woman. The narration even goes as far as to explain that Dôkyô “...had intercourse with the empress on the same pillow, hearing the affairs of state and ruling over the country together.” and concludes that “*The above songs were prediction of his relations with the empress and his control over state affairs.*” Even if the two songs written down by Kyôkai did actually exist among the common people, it is somewhat difficult to understand why a monk who supposedly had been a man of high moral principles would go to such lengths as to describe a supposedly intimate relationship in such an obscene way. The connotation of the word “彌” (amanushi) translated by Nakamura as “erect” but which could also mean “to fill”, combined with the word “槌” (tsuchi; hammer) could be understood as a reference to men’s genitals. Even though that direct interpretation is somewhat softened by the explanation that the phrase itself refers rather to the love affairs of a monk than to his genitals, the word choice leaves little to the imagination. In the case of the second song, the way in which the phrasing could be interpreted is even more cynical. And while in the first song, the person who becomes the subject of such ridicule had been “only” a Buddhist monk, in the second song, it is a member of the Imperial House, and a former emperor at that, whose

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<sup>847</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 277/278

anatomy is described in a most shameless way: “*the dark valley of [Emperor Shôtoku’s] thighs*”. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô, a description of the intimate parts of a former emperor, a woman at that, could be considered disrespectful. It would have made sense if the sovereign was criticized for her support of Dôkyô or for giving him high court positions and thus practically unlimited political power. Instead, she is being criticized for a relationship which could or could not have been a passionate one. In any case, as it was already discussed, official chronicles such as Shoku Nihongi deny any possibility of a love affair between the emperor and the Buddhist monk.

From that point of view, it is hard to understand why a monk such as Kyôkai who wanted to “*offer [his] hand to lead them to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil*”<sup>848</sup> would have narrated songs with such contents and thus would have encouraged the spreading of evil, that is rumors and offensive words. Moreover, as Nakamura points out, “*The Nihon ryôiki, instead of making negative statements about women, maintains the equality of men and women before dharma.*”<sup>849</sup>, which makes Kyôkai’s depiction of the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô even more difficult to comprehend. As unbelievable as it could seem, one of the potential reasons for such portrayal could have been namely the monk’s own wish to guide people and to help them distinguish right from wrong. By presenting the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô, both lay Buddhists at that, in such vivid colors, he could have wanted to leave a strong impression on the people and to emphasize the wrongness of such an affair to the point that nobody would have thought about that in an even remotely good light. It could have been that for the common good, Kyôkai decided to adopt the end-justifies-the-means mentality, and thus readily utilized any means possible, even falsehoods or unproved speculations, in order to achieve his goal. At the same time, one can not exclude the political situation in the country at the time from the potential list of reasons for the negative portrayal. As it was mentioned, Emperor Kanmu was the emperor who during his 25-years-long reign proclaimed fifty edicts in an attempt to uproot the bad practices and the low moral from the Buddhist clergy. Those measures could be seen as a clear indication that after the Dôkyô Incident, the Imperial House was determined to take a firm hold on the Buddhist monks in order to prevent their active participation in politics. From that point of view, it could be speculated that it was not difficult for the emperor to exert pressure on a low-ranked monk, who at the time happened to compile a collection of stories about former political figures and their good and bad deeds, and to advise him to portray the close relationship between a ruler and a Buddhist monk as sinful and immoral, as something which even the common people would laugh at, thus preventing both the members of the clergy and those of the Imperial House from committing the same mistake.

## Heian Period

### Political and cultural situation

#### The Imperial House’s attempt to escape from Fujiwara’s hold

The Heian period (794 – 1185) remained in Japanese history as “*Japan’s classical age, when court power was at its zenith and aristocratic culture flourished*”<sup>850</sup>. It began with Emperor Kanmu’s (r. 781 – 806) decision to relocate the capital from Heijô-kyô to Heian-kyô, which abided by the old tradition of rulers changing their seats of power after their ascension to the throne. Moreover, it is believed that the change was inspired by the emperor’s opinion of Nara as the center of the Tenmu line of the Imperial House, as well as a stronghold of Buddhism, the strengthening of which caused the rise to

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<sup>848</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [6]/[7]

<sup>849</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [71]/[72]

<sup>850</sup> Hurst III (b) 2007: 30

power of ambitious monks such as Dôkyô. In order to evade the repeated occurrence of unfortunate events such as the Dôkyô Incident, Kanmu decided that a new base of the Imperial power had to be established.<sup>851</sup> Moreover, a change of the capital would have also created an opportunity for the Tenji line of the Imperial House to which Emperor Kanmu also belonged to strengthen its hold on the throne. After much thought, the emperor's first choice was Nagaoka-kyô. Unfortunately, a series of disasters (floods and diseases caused by them) accompanied by "*inauspicious political events*"<sup>852</sup> forced the sovereign to relocate the capital once more, this time to Heian-kyô, in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of 794. Thus, the year of the second capital change became the starting point for a new epoch in Japanese history. The new capital, modern-day Kyôto, remained center of the Japanese government until 1868.

Apparently Kanmu did not believe that a simple change of capitals would strengthen the authority of the Imperial House that had diminished significantly at the end of the Nara period. Therefore, the emperor tried to reinforce the Ritsuryô system which could be considered the administrative and law apparatus supporting the Imperial House.<sup>853</sup> Furthermore, in order to emphasize his strong political will, Emperor Kanmu also launched campaigns against the Emishi. His reign saw the appointment of the first military generals (shôguns).<sup>854</sup> Through their military success, it was possible for the Imperial House to expand its authority to the eastern end of Honshû. Ironically, however, the Heian period was an epoch during which strong emperors took turns with weak rulers. That situation was most beneficial for the noble families such as Fujiwara. During the Heian period, they reached the peak of their power and influence at court to the point that they could enthrone and dethrone emperors according to their will. Thus, the reign of a strong sovereign such as Kanmu<sup>855</sup> was followed by such of weak and indecisive rulers who did not have the will, or simply the power, to act against Fujiwara's rise to ultimate power. The death of Emperor Saga (r. 809 – 823) in 823 marked the beginning of the latter's strengthening. In 858, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa became a regent (sesshō) for the young Emperor Seiwa (r. 858 – 876), and thus the first person outside the Imperial House to hold the title. In 880, Fujiwara no Mototsune was appointed kanpaku (a chief advisor for the emperor; a position combining the responsibilities of both first secretary and regent for an adult sovereign). From then on, the position of the Fujiwara only grew stronger.<sup>856</sup> By the year 1000, Fujiwara no Michinaga was so powerful that he could dethrone and enthrone emperors at will. The Imperial House had practically become a puppet in the hands of the Fujiwara and affairs of the state were handled through their private administration.

At the same time, while the Fujiwara's hold on the state and the throne grew stronger, decentralization continued. It could have been seen most vividly in the land management where the shôen (荘園 or 庄園; manor; domain) holders began to evade the need to pay taxes to the central government and practically became lords in their own estates.<sup>857</sup> That situation contrasted strongly with the initial intention behind the establishment of the shôen system as the Imperial civil administrative apparatus. During its first stage, an ownership of a shôen was acquired in an exchange of an annual rental fee for the paddy fields.<sup>858</sup> The second phase saw the return to the so-called "house governments" in a manner similar to that of the old clan system. As a result, the economic strengthening of the land owners due to the weakening of the centralized government brought forth changes in the military

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<sup>851</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 20

<sup>852</sup> McCullough (a) 1999: 21

<sup>853</sup> See Hurst III (b) 2007: 31

<sup>854</sup> See McCullough/Shively 1999: xviii

<sup>855</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 25

<sup>856</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 25

<sup>857</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 37/38

<sup>858</sup> See Kaplan 1994: 13

situation at land. While earlier the central government held all control over the army due to its strong hold on the land and the nobles, the decentralization caused the military affairs' return to the hands of the local landlords who once more had the resources to recruit soldiers. Thus, the local nobles went back to the notion of the old clan structures before the Taika Reform according to which they held absolute military and economic power in their respective estates.<sup>859</sup> On the other hand, the warriors recruited by these lords began to establish their own organizations in which mutual interests and family connections were considered paramount. Eventually, a balance between the landlords, who sought someone to guard their estates, and the military families, who sought better position in society, was reached. The warriors pledged allegiance to the nobles and used those contacts to establish their own connections at court. At the same time, the landlords were the ones officially recognized as the leaders of those warrior families, a reality which strengthened the former's political and social stance. The most prominent clans that grew stronger during the times of change were Taira and Minamoto.<sup>860</sup> Despite their (still) strong hold on power, the Fujiwara surely did not expect that the decentralization to which they most actively had contributed would have a negative reflection on their own authority. The growing freedom of the local landlords combined with their refusal to pay taxes to the central government, the population growth in the estates, and the decline in food production eventually led to competition for resources between the powerful clans (Fujiwara, Taira and Minamoto) which did not remain within the boundaries of the political scene. On it, all three families were powerful enough, as they had blood connections to the Imperial House. Eventually, it was the military power which was to decide the winner.<sup>861</sup>

At the same time, it should be noted that during the period of struggles between the nobles, the Imperial family, albeit weakened, had not been a mere observer. The last hundred years of the Heian period (1086 – 1185) were marked by the establishment of a new political system which changed the dynamics within and outside the Imperial House. That was the *insei*, or "cloister government", in which state matters were handled by the abdicated sovereign. The official beginning of that new system was set by Emperor Go-Sanjō (1068 – 1073), the first Japanese ruler without Fujiwara blood coursing through his veins since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Before his reign, Imperial abdications were not seen as a tool for holding on power. As G. Cameron Hurst III explains,

"Imperial abdications before Go-Sanjō can be divided into three chronological periods. From the first recorded abdication, that of the empress Kogyoku in 645, through the reign of Kammu in 806 marks a distinct period during which the practice of abdication began and became well established as a means of dynastic transfer. From the reign of Heizei in 806 through the death of En'yū in 991 can be seen as a second period, during which abdication became so frequent that it was almost expected of an emperor. It was also a period during which several ex-sovereigns wielded considerable political power within both the imperial house and the entire court society. The third period, 991-1068, from the reign of Ichijō through that of Go-Reizei, was the highpoint of Sekkanke domination of the imperial house under the regencies of Michinaga and Yorimichi. During this period Fujiwara leaders kept a close watch over the matter of succession and were hesitant to allow abdications, probably because they had learned how potentially powerful an ex-emperor could be.

In the first period abdication appears to have developed in conjunction with female rule during a time of great political change in Japan. [...] After abdication, sovereigns were given the title *dajō tennō* (great abdicated sovereign) and treated with considerable respect. [...] Regardless

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<sup>859</sup> See Kaplan 1994: 13

<sup>860</sup> See Kaplan 1994: 1

<sup>861</sup> Kaplan 1994: 1

of the familial relationships between abdicated and titular sovereign, the position of emperor was considered supreme.

During the second period abdication became so common that eleven of the fifteen emperors who reigned during that time yielded the throne. More important, ex-emperors became the most venerated figures in court society, and several of them [...] exercised considerable influence within the imperial house and in the imperial government. Whereas in the first period the emperor seems to have been superior to the abdicated sovereign in all aspects, during this times private, familial relationships within the imperial house came to supersede public positions. [...] It was also during this period that ex-sovereigns developed a well-organized administrative apparatus to handle their private affairs.”<sup>862</sup>

The function of the Retired sovereign began to take its final form during the reign of Go-Sanjō. After seeing the weakened state of the Imperial family combined with the societal crisis caused by the growing freedom of the local landlords, the emperor undertook reforms in an attempt to strengthen the Imperial authority and to stabilize the economic situation at land. The sovereign came to the conclusion that the vast estates of the nobles were the key to their power. However, if the Imperial House managed to take back the shōen, that would only return authority to its initial, and rightful, holder, that is the emperor.<sup>863</sup> Go-Sanjō planned the establishment of In-no-chō (院庁), or ex-sovereign’s office, the purpose of which was to issue documents on his behalf and through which the Retired ruler could practically conduct his rule.<sup>864</sup> Thus, the way for the Imperial House’s direct intervention in the acquisition of shōen was paved. While it was against the code of conduct of a sitting sovereign to directly engage in politics, the retired ruler was not chained in such a way. He was free to confiscate shōen, and thus to weaken powerful noble families such as the Fujiwara. In that train of thought, Kuroda Toshio and Professor John W. Hall give a systematized explanation of the insei system’s purpose and the Imperial House’s role in the political world at the time.

“He sees the political structure of medieval Japan as one of competition between a number of powerful families or kinship blocs (*kemmon*) of which the imperial house was one. In Kuroda’s view what is important in the concept of *insei* is the establishment of the In-no-chō and the acquisition of shōen by the imperial house. In his commentary of the *insei*, Professor John W. Hall, relying upon Kuroda’s work, concludes that these two developments indicate that the “imperial house itself .... was obliged to look to its own organization and to assert itself as a separate kinship bloc in the contest for power at court.”<sup>865</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his intentions, Go-Sanjō died without being able to see the completion of his plans. The system was eventually established by his son Shirakawa after his abdication in 1086. He continued to rule as a retired emperor until his death in 1129. After him, the emperors Toba (r. 1107 – 1123) and Go-Shirakawa (r. 1155 – 1158) followed in his footsteps and ruled the country as retired rather than sitting sovereigns. They polished the system and established channels of direct government in which the actual ruler was bypassed.<sup>866</sup> Thus, the Imperial House was able to effectively exclude the Fujiwara from the decision-making process without directly banishing them. They retained their position as regents or advisors for the emperor but since actual power was held by another, they were practically powerless. Gradually, Fujiwara family members were replaced with members of other

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<sup>862</sup> Hurst III (a) 1988: 64/65

<sup>863</sup> Hurst III (a) 1988: 62

<sup>864</sup> See Hurst III (a) 1988: 60

<sup>865</sup> Hurst III (a) 1988: 62

<sup>866</sup> See Hurst III (a) 1988: 60/61

powerful families, mainly the Minamoto. Thus, an opportunity was opened up for the military-supported families who began to gradually attain more influence on the political scene. The foundation for their eventual rise to power was laid by the disturbances from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century which remained in history under the name Hôgen no Ran (Hôgen Rebellion). The reason for the struggle had been a loophole in the insei system which allowed several sovereigns to abdicate, that is to hold power, simultaneously. Such was the case in 1155/56 when a quarrel between a retired (Sutoku) and a sitting emperor (Go-Shirakawa)<sup>867</sup> created opportunities for both Fujiwara to win back their dominant position at court, and military families to rise to power. Fujiwara no Tadamichi, first son of the regent Fujiwara no Tadazane, sided with Go-Shirakawa, while his younger brother Fujiwara no Yorinaga sided with Sutoku. Each side was able to win over members of the warrior families Minamoto and Taira. For Sutoku, that were Minamoto no Tameyoshi, head of his clan, and Taira no Tadamasa. Go-Shirakawa was supported by Minamoto no Yoshitomo, first son of Tameyoshi, and Taira no Kiyomori, nephew of Taira no Tadamasa and head of the Taira clan.<sup>868</sup> Eventually, Go-Shirakawa's side was victorious and an end was put both to the succession conflict and to Fujiwara's hopes of their return to power. At the same time, the Taira and Minamoto clans rose to power and supplanted Fujiwara as the new powerholders at court.

In 1159, Taira no Kiyomori left the capital on a pilgrimage, which created an opportunity for Minamoto no Yoritomo to strike. The clash between the two families remained in history as Heiji no Ran (Heiji Rebellion). Eventually, the Taira were able to defeat the Minamoto, and a new era of Taira dominance at court began. Similar to Fujiwara before them, Kiyomori and his clan also tried to control the Imperial House through marriage policy. His daughter Tokuko (Tokushi) was married off to Emperor Takakura (r. 1168 – 1181). When the sovereign died at the age of 19, he left his son by Tokuko, Antoku, as his successor.<sup>869</sup> Parallel to his marriage policy, Taira no Kiyomori tried to gain control over the state by filling government positions with his relatives, exiling court officials who opposed him, and even razing two temples (Tôdaiji and Kôfukuji). Taira's hold on the court, however, caused them to become negligent in the problems at land.<sup>870</sup> That allowed Minamoto to strengthen their own positions. As a result, the death of Taira no Kiyomori in 1181 was followed by Minamoto's attack on the capital, which set the beginning of the Genpei War. The Taira tried to flee by sea together with Empress Dowager Tokuko and Emperor Antoku. In the battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185, however, their forces were completely defeated, and the young emperor drowned.<sup>871</sup> Takakura's other son succeeded him as the new emperor and assumed the name Go-Toba, while Minamoto no Yoritomo became shôgun and established his military government (bakufu)<sup>872</sup>, thus setting the beginning of a rule of the military class and effectively ending the long era of Fujiwara dominance. In the end, the Imperial House's attempts to rid itself of the Fujiwara led to a situation in which the emperor's authority was not restored but rather further weakened, as the nobles' hold on power was replaced with that of the warriors.

### Religious and cultural changes

Considering the dynamic socio-political developments during the Heian period, it was inevitable that they left their mark on the Japanese culture and religion. As a result, the early Heian period which could be considered more politically stable continued the cultural tendencies of the Nara period (for example, similar to Nara, the new capital was also patterned after the Tang capital Chang'an but on a

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<sup>867</sup> Takeuchi 1999: 689

<sup>868</sup> Takeuchi 1999: 689

<sup>869</sup> See Takeuchi 1999: 696

<sup>870</sup> See Takeuchi 1999: 696/697

<sup>871</sup> See Takeuchi 1999: 707

<sup>872</sup> See Takeuchi 1999: 705, 709

larger scale<sup>873</sup>), while the later Heian period was marked by active changes in both the religious and cultural sphere. Namely the latter contributed to the description “Japan’s Classical Age” in reference to that epoch in Japanese history.<sup>874</sup>

Speaking of religious changes, Buddhism underwent further evolution. In 806, a new Mahayana Buddhist school called Tendai was established by monk Saichō. As Hazama Jikō explains,

“The Tendai 天台 school founded by Dengyō Daishi Saichō 伝教大師最澄 (767-822) is based primarily on the thought and practices of the Chinese T’ien-t’ai Lotus 天台法華 tradition. [...]

The first characteristic of the Japanese Tendai school is its advocacy of a comprehensive Buddhism, the ideal of a Buddhist school based on what is called the “One Great Perfect Teaching” 一大円教, the idea that all the teachings of the Buddha are ultimately without contradiction and can be unified in one comprehensive and perfect system. [...] Saichō transmitted not only the teachings of the T’ien-t’ai tradition but also the Zen 禪 and esoteric Buddhist 密教 traditions, and the bodhisattva precepts 梵網菩薩戒. He incorporated all of these elements under the rubric of the Japanese Tendai school to create a new school which was a synthesis of these four traditions.”<sup>875</sup>

Prior to Saichō’s time, Buddhism was concentrated in the cities, which made it too entangled in the secular affairs of the state. The best example of that could be given by Dōkyō’s elevation to the position of Prime Minister during the reign of Emperor Shōtoku, and the Dōkyō Incident which eventually had catastrophic effect on the reputation of the Buddhist monks in general. Saichō, who personally observed the developments of urban Buddhism, came to the conclusion that change was needed for both the teaching of Buddha and its clergy if they wanted to move forward in accordance with the times. As a result of that determination, he decided to climb Mount Hiei and to stay there without fancy clothing or delicious food in pursuit of enlightenment – a decision which brought forth significant change in the general view on Buddhism.<sup>876</sup> In time, the school “*included specialists both in the esoteric tradition (shanagō 遮那業) and T’ien-t’ai proper (shikangō 止観業), propagated the bodhisattva precepts 円頓大戒, and later added the practice of nenbutsu 念仏 and faith in Amida. [...] Saichō included both esoteric and exoteric teachings, and avoided an obsession with any one category of the Buddhist tradition such as Zen or the precepts. He sought instead to unite all of these elements on the basis of a single fundamental principle, the comprehensive and unifying ekayāna spirit of the Lotus Sūtra, and harness this ideal for the good of the country as a whole, to “protect the nation” 鎮護国家.*”<sup>877</sup> While those teachings make Tendai relatable to the people, the choice of headquarters was helpful for its acceptance by the court. The new capital Heian-kyō was situated at the foot of the mountain, which made the contact between the Imperial House and the Tendai school much easier. Emperor Kanmu had been a notable patron of the new sect as it could be seen by the rules of

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<sup>873</sup> See Coaldrake 1991: 45

<sup>874</sup> „...Heian Japan represents a return to “native” traditions. [...] By the mid-Heian period, however, with the emergence of the kana-based syllabary, a “native” literature blossomed. Moreover, artistic representations became more Japanese, and Shintō–Buddhist religious syncretism resulted in a more “Japanese” form of religious expression. It is in this sense that Heian represents Japan’s “classical age,” a time when a truly Japanese culture flourished.”, Hurst III (b) 2007: 33

<sup>875</sup> Hazama 1987: 101

<sup>876</sup> See Hazama 1987: 110/111

<sup>877</sup> Hazama 1987: 102



appointing and nurturing disciples created by Saichō and known as Sange gakushōshiki. According to them,

“...two gifted men were to be appointed annually for a period of six years, during which they were to learn to chant and become familiar with the content of the Lotus Sūtra and the Suvarnaprabhāsa Sūtra, and after passing a test would be ordained as monks 得度 on the seventeenth day of the third month (the anniversary of Emperor Kanmu's death).”<sup>878</sup>

While the location of the Tendai school's seat was one, if not the main, key for its acceptance by both the common people and the court, the Shingon school established by monk Kūkai in 816 made itself recognized mainly due to the fame of its founder. Monk Kūkai, known as Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師, Great Master of the Propagation of Dharma) was an independent monk well versed in Chinese literature, calligraphy and Buddhist texts. From an early age, he showed interest in the esoteric Buddhist teachings and sought solitude in the forests in order to learn mantras.<sup>879</sup> Once having dreamt of “*the Dainichikyō, one of the basic Mikkyō scriptures*”<sup>880</sup>, Kūkai, who experienced enormous difficulties in understanding the text, decided to go to China. Upon his arrival there in 805, he met Hui-kuo, a monk who “*was recognized as the foremost master of esoteric Buddhism in China*”<sup>881</sup>, and became his student. In the short span of three months, Hui-kuo taught Kūkai everything he knew about the Mandala of the Two Realms, as well as Sanskrit and Chinese. The Chinese monk acknowledged Kūkai as his last disciple and proclaimed him a Dharma successor. After Hui-kuo's death in the 12<sup>th</sup> month of 805, Kūkai returned to Japan. He systematized all his knowledge into a doctrine of pure esoteric Buddhism which was meant to become the basis for his new school. His first established monastery was that on Mount Kōya in 816.<sup>882</sup> Initially, the new sect did not have a name and Kūkai himself didn't recognize it as a separate school of thought. The term Shingon-Shū (真言宗, Mantra School) was eventually established by Emperor Junna (r. 823 – 833). The school's teachings and emphasis on ritual made it popular among many traditional noble families such as the Fujiwara. Their favor allowed the Shingon school to spread its wings in the capital as several important temples became its ritual centers.<sup>883</sup> Kūkai's vast knowledge – literature, calligraphy, esoteric teachings, Chinese, Sanskrit, sculpture, poetry – impressed both the court and the nobility and vastly influenced other schools of Buddhism (even Tendai), thus paving Buddhism's way to its political and social acceptance.

Kūkai's vast knowledge which helped him and his school of thought to gain the favor of the court and the nobility became an inspiration for many. In the first place, his most powerful supporters, the Fujiwara, became the driving force behind the rapid cultural and artistic development at court and among the aristocracy. Despite the fact that literacy still remained a privilege for the high classes of society, new literary genres influenced by the common people were born. Such had been the novels, the essays, and the monogatari (物語). As it was mentioned, it was in the Heian period when the setsuwa anthology *Nihon ryōiki* by Kyōkai was completed. These lighter literary genres eventually influenced the creation of new writing systems. In addition to kanbun which remained the official court language, first katakana and then hiragana were developed. The katakana was a simplified script created by using parts of Chinese characters. It became the basis for the creation of hiragana – a cursive syllabary with a distinct writing method that was uniquely Japanese and gave written expression to

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<sup>878</sup> Hazama 1987: 111

<sup>879</sup> See Weinstein 1999: 474

<sup>880</sup> Weinstein 1999: 474

<sup>881</sup> Weinstein 1999: 475

<sup>882</sup> See Weinstein 1999: 477

<sup>883</sup> See Weinstein 1999: 477/478

the spoken word. The hiragana became widespread among court women who wanted to write but, in contrast to his male counterparts, were not educated in Chinese.<sup>884</sup> Later on, it was namely the female authors who created some of the most significant works of the Heian period. The Pillow Book (枕草子, Makura no Sôshi) by Sei Shônagon compiled at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was recognized for both its value as a literary work and its significance as a historical document. The Tale of Genji (源氏物語, Genji monogatari) written by Murasaki Shikibu in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century and depicting the everyday life of the courtiers<sup>885</sup> came to be recognized as, citing Kawabata Yasunari in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “*the highest pinnacle of the Japanese literature*”<sup>886</sup>. Poetry also experienced an uplift during the Heian period. To be well versed in the art of poetry was considered a sign of high education and knowledge. Poems became an essential part of the communication between nobles, with one piece being able to even shatter someone’s reputation. The art of writing played an immense role in the reception of a poem, as it was believed that the writing style showed a person’s inner thoughts and feelings. Thus, calligraphy became an essential part of the literary culture during the Heian period.<sup>887</sup> Alongside literature, painting was also an art form which experienced a new life during that epoch. Yamato-e<sup>888</sup>, Japanese style painting of court life, temples or shrines, became a popular form of expression for the artists.

All things considered, while the Nara period could be described as the time when a series of major changes enabled the Yamato state to develop an independent political system and culture, it was during the Heian period when those changes took its final form. Eventually, the imported bureaucratic system, the set of laws and regulations known in Japan as the Ritsuryô Code, proved insufficient for the Japanese political world. Its inflexibility combined with the societal differences between China and Japan made the Code’s implementation impossible in the later phases of the development of the Yamato state. These flaws led to the gradual weakening of the Imperial authority which had already been jeopardized after the Fujiwara had begun to marry off their daughters into the Imperial House. A weak emperor meant strengthening of the local nobles and landlords. Families such as Minamoto and Taira were able to obtain vast territories, or speaking precisely arable land, and became more or less independent of the central government. However, despite having already fully utilized the flaws in the law in order to obtain economic power, those families were unable to create a new legal system that would have satisfied the needs of the Japanese society. The lack of stable administrative apparatus led to massive difficulties in the implementation of even the most basic economic exchanges.<sup>889</sup> Eventually, these developments proved fatal for the old nobles’ influence at court. Warrior families or noble families supported by warrior clans gradually attained more power at court – initially due to their better economic situation, and then due to their political connections. While the warrior class’ rise to power was a cause for concern, it would not have been enough to overturn the Fujiwara’s hold on the throne if it had not been for the Imperial House. In an attempt to take back their lost power, several emperors contributed to the creation of the insei system. Unfortunately, however, the system only created a division of the Imperial authority between the sitting and the retired sovereign, as it was the Retired Emperor, unchained by the code of conduct expected from the ruler, who held an actual power. Thus, the Fujiwara were put under pressure by the warrior families, on the one hand, and the insei system, on the other hand. Under such circumstances, their downfall was only a matter

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<sup>884</sup> See Tranter 2012: 218

<sup>885</sup> See Hurst III (b) 2007: 36

<sup>886</sup> See Kawabata 1968: “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself.”

<sup>887</sup> See Yoda 2004: 97

<sup>888</sup> See Willmann 2003: Yamato-e Painting

<sup>889</sup> For example, minted currency began to be neglected in favor of objects or goods (for example, rice)., See Gay 2001: 161

of time. Of course, while the defeat of the Fujiwara was the main target of both the emperor and the warrior families, their respective end purposes were completely different. In the end, the Imperial authority faltered under the division of power and the power struggles between retired sovereigns. On the other hand, the warrior families Taira and Minamoto were able to replace Fujiwara as the powerholders at court. At first, it was the Taira who tried to create a political system centered around them. Their touch with the court and its pleasures, however, weakened their resolve and political insight and they were overthrown by the Minamoto who set the beginning of a long series of military governments (bakufu), with generals (shôgun) standing at the apex of the political world.

The abovementioned political dynamics also influenced the cultural and religious sphere of the country. Buddhism continued to develop itself in its search for points of contact with the court. Both the Tendai and the Shingon schools established in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by Saichô and Kûkai, respectively, were sects which eventually gained the favor of the court, the nobles, and the common people. Thanks to that, Buddhism's jeopardized reputation due to the Dôkyô Incident was partially restored. Saichô's and Kûkai's vast knowledge also helped Buddhism to become an inspiration for the others to further educate themselves. That influence also propelled the development of culture. The most notable changes were in the sphere of the literature where two new writing systems, katakana and hiragana, were created in order to make writing easier for the female and the people uneducated in Chinese. Moreover, the women at court also experienced a period of success, as many of them became authors whose works became a model for the next generations. At the same time, poetry flourished to the point that it became a universal tool for communication between nobles. To sum it up, the Heian period could be considered the era in which the Japanese society underwent major changes with vast consequences for the future. Considering the dynamic political situation and the changes in the literature, art and religion stemming therefrom, it would be interesting to analyze the description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in the texts from that epoch.

### Emperor Shôtoku's portrayal in *Nihon kôki*

Previously, it was briefly mentioned that *Nihon kôki* is a historical text compiled in 840 by the Fujiwara family members Otsugu, Yoshino and Yoshifusa. Fujiwara no Otsugu was the grandson of Fujiwara no Umakai, one of the infamous four Fujiwara brothers who died of the plague from 737. He took charge of building Heian-kyô and also proposed the suspension of the punitive expeditions to Ezo after he was promoted to sangi at the age of 29.<sup>890</sup> During the reign of Emperor Heizei (r. 806 – 809), Otsugu worked on political reforms, including the establishment of an inspection system of the local governments. He reached the pinnacle of his political career during the reign of his nephew Emperor Junna (r. 823 – 833) when he was appointed first as Minister of the Right and then as Minister of the Left almost one after another.<sup>891</sup> Fujiwara no Yoshifusa was the first person outside the Imperial family who was appointed as sesshō (regent) for his grandson Emperor Seiwa. His designation set the beginning of a series of Fujiwara regents, which could be regarded as the pinnacle of the family's political influence.<sup>892</sup> Compared to Otsugu and Yoshifusa, Fujiwara no Yoshino could be described as a rather unremarkable person. Similar to Otsugu, he belonged to a branch of the Fujiwara family called Fujiwara Shikike. The said branch was established by Fujiwara no Umakai, with the name deriving from the fact that the eldest Fujiwara brother had been the head of the Shikibu-shô (式部省, "Ministry of Ceremonial"). Thus, Shikike may be translated as the "Ceremonial House."<sup>893</sup> Yoshino's political career was centered around Emperor Junna whose mother also belonged to the Fujiwara Shikike. Initially appointed a

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<sup>890</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 32

<sup>891</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (a): Fujiwara no Otsugu (藤原緒嗣)

<sup>892</sup> See McCullough (a) 1999: 45

<sup>893</sup> See McCullough (b) 1999: 128

governor of the province Suruga, he was called back to the capital after Junna's enthronement and assisted him as his secretary. Later on, he held simultaneously the positions of chûnagon, captain of the Right Palace Guards, and master of the Crown Prince's Quarters. After Junna's abdication in 833, Yoshino decided to follow him. After the Retired Emperor's death in 840, Fujiwara no Yoshino considered retirement from politics and only Emperor Ninmyô's persuasion convinced him to retain his position as chûnagon. Two years later, he was suspected of treason together with Crown Prince Tsunesada. He was demoted to Provisional Governor-General of Dazaifu (大宰權帥, dazai no gon no sochi), and then, three years later, confined in Yamashiro Province where he died of illness. In general, Fujiwara no Yoshino was considered a great scholar, which could explain his participation in the compilation of Nihon kôki.<sup>894</sup>

The historical work was commissioned by Emperor Saga (r. 809 – 823) as a continuation of Shoku Nihongi. It covers the reigns of four emperors – Kanmu, Heizei, Saga, and Junna. In contrast to previous chronicles in which criticism, when existing, is expressed subtly, Nihon kôki adopted a different approach. As it could be seen in the Wake-no-Kiyomaro-den, the biography of Wake no Kiyomaro in which one could also find information about his sister Hôkin, about the siblings' interactions with Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and, last but not least, about the Dôkyô Incident, the chronicle narrates the events much more directly. An interesting approach is also the choice to present the reigns of the emperors through the “eyes” of an Imperial subject. In Emperor Shôtoku's case, it is the aftermath of the Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion and the Dôkyô Incident which are narrated from Kiyomaro's “point of view”. Thus, one finds some facts that otherwise could not be found in the official chronicles, for example:

“寶字八年大保惠美忍勝叛逆伏誅。連及當斬者三百七十五人。法均切諫。天皇納之。減死刑以處流・徒。乱止之後。民苦飢疫。弃子草間。遣人收養。得八十三兒。同名養子。賜葛木首。此時僧道鏡得幸於天皇。出入警蹕。一擬乘輿。號曰法王。大宰主神習宜阿蘇麻呂、媚事道鏡。矯八幡神教言。令道鏡即帝位。天下太平。道鏡聞之。情喜自負。天皇召清麻呂於牀下。曰。夢有人來。稱八幡神使云。爲奏事請尼法均。朕答曰。法均軟弱。難堪遠路。其代遣清麻呂。汝宜早參聽神之教。道鏡復喚清麻呂。募以大臣之位。先是路真人豐永爲道鏡之師。語清麻呂云。道鏡若登天位。吾以何面目可爲其臣。吾與二三子共爲今日之伯夷耳。清麻呂深然其言。常懷致命之志。往詣神宮。神託宣云々。清麻呂祈曰。今大神所教。是國家之大事也。託宣難信。願示神異。神即忽然現形。其長三丈許。色如滿月。清麻呂消魂失度。不能仰見。於是神託宣。我國家君臣分定。而道鏡悖逆無道。輒望神器。是以神靈震怒。不聽其祈。汝歸如吾言奏之。天之日嗣必續皇緒。汝勿懼道鏡之怨。吾必相濟。清麻呂歸來。奏如神教。天皇不忍誅。爲因幡員外介。尋改姓名。爲別部穢麻呂。流于大隅國。尼法均還俗。爲別部狹蟲。流于備後國。道鏡又追將殺清麻呂於道。雷雨晦暝。未即行。俄而勅使來、僅得免。于時參議右大辨藤原朝臣百川愍其忠烈。便割備後國封鄉廿戶。送充於配處。”<sup>895</sup>

<sup>894</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (b): Fujiwara no Yoshino (藤原吉野)

<sup>895</sup> 日本後紀 [Nihon kôki], Vol.8, 延曆 [Enryaku] 18.2.21

[Hôji 8. Jahr stiftete der Taihō Emi Oshikatsu Empörung an und ward gerichtet. Von denen, die mit ihm gewesen, sollten 375 Personen hingerichtet werden. Hōkin mahnte ernstlich (dagegen). Die Himmlische Majestät hörte darauf und verminderte die Todesstrafe in Verbannung oder (befristete) Fron. Nach Beendigung der Wirren litt das Volk schwer an Hunger und Seuchen. Hiromushi schickte Leute aus, die im Grase ausgesetzt liegenden Kinder aufzulesen, damit sie dieselben ernähre; so erhielt sie 83 Kinder; unter gleichem Namen zog sie sie als Adoptivkinder auf. Es erfolgte Beleihung als Katsuraki no Obito. Zu der Zeit ward dem Monch Dōkyō die (besondere) Gunst der Himmlischen Majestät zuteil. Beim Aus- und Eingang in den Palast ertönte der Rur „Bahn frei! (Zu Boden!)“; zugleich mit der Himmlischen Majestät sass er in dem Gefährte. Er ward Dharma-König (Hōō) benannt. Des Dazaifu Haupt-Gottes-Negi Asomaro tat Schmeichlerisches gegen Dōkyō; er bog der Hachiman-Gottheit Weisungsworte dahin: (Hachiman) heisse Dōkyō den Kaiserthron besteigen, die Welt (tenka) werde dann in Frieden und Ordnung sein. Dōkyō vernahm es mit Freuden und Selbststolz. Die Himmlische Majestät beschied Kiyomaro unten an den Thron (Toko) und sprach: „Im Traume kam ein Mann, des Hachiman Botschaft: die hiess: Wegen einer dem Throne vorzutragenden Sache erbitten wir die Nonne Hōkin. – Wir antworteten und sprachen: Hōkin ist zart und schwach und erträgt nicht den weiten Weg. An ihrer Statt senden wir Kiyomaro, zu kommen und des Gottes Weisung zu vernehmen.“ – Dōkyō seinerseits rief Kiyomaro und suchte ihn mit Stand und Rang des Gross-Kanzlers (Daijin) auf seine Seite zu ziehen. Vordem war Michi no Mabito Toyonaga der Lehrer (Meister) Dōkyō's gewesen. Er redete mit Kiyomaro und sprach: „Wenn Dōkyō den Himmelsthron besteigt, mit welchem Gesichte ist es dann möglich, sein Untertan (Vasall) zu sein? Dann gilt es mit zwei, drei Edeln des heutigen Tages (Treivasall) Bo-i sein.“ Kiyomaro bewegte tief im Herzen dies Wort. Immer trug er im Busen den Willen (Entschluss), für das Höchste das Leben einzusetzen. Er reiste zu dem Gottesschreine. Das Gottesorakel gab eine Verkündigung. Kiyomaro betete und sprach: „Worüber die Grosse Gottheit jetzt Weisung gegeben, ist die Grosse Angelegenheit von Reich und Land. Der (geschehenen) Gottesweisung (allein) wird schwerlich geglaubt. Ich bitte, ein Göttliches Ungewöhnliches (shin-i ein Wunder) zu erzeugen.“ Alsbald offenbarte (der Gott) die (wahre) Gestalt; (deren) Länge war etwa drei Ruten; der Aspekt war dem Vollmond gleich. Kiyomaro entschwanden die Sinne, und er verlor das Bewusstsein. Er vermochte nicht weiter aufzublicken und zu schauen. Darauf kündete das Orakel: „In unserem Reiche (kokka) sind Fürst und Untertan festbestimmt (voneinander) geschieden; Dōkyō aber will aufrührerisch den Unweg (mu-dō) was nicht „Weg“, „Sinn“, „Sitte und Recht“ ist) und begehrt unmittelbar nach den Göttlichen Insignien. Daher bebt der Göttliche Geist vor Zorn und hört nicht auf seine Gebete. Kehre du zurück und melde dem Throne mein Wort! Des Himmels Sonnen-Nachfolge kann und darf nur (einzig) in der Kaiserlichen Linie sich fortsetzen. Habe du keine Furcht vor Dōkyō's Groll! Ich stehe gewiss dir zur Seite.“ Kiyomaro kam zurück. Er meldete, wie die Gottheit gewiesen. Die Himmlische Majestät brachte es nicht über sich, ihn zu richten. Sie machte ihn zum Überzähligen Suke von Inaba und änderte Geschlecht und Name in Wakebe no Kegaremaro (Schmutz-Marō) und verbannte ihn nach Land Ōsumi. Die Nonne Hōkin wurde wieder in das Laienleben zurückgeschickt, ihr Name zu Wakebe no Samushi (schmales enges Mushi) gemacht, und sie nach Land Bingo verbannt. Dōkyō seinerseits verfolgte Kiyomaro und gedachte, ihn auf dem Wege zu töten. Da kam Gewitter, Regen, Finsternis; die Hinrichtung ward noch nicht vollführt, da erschien plötzlich ein Kaiserlicher Sonderbote und Kiyomaro erhielt in letzter Stunde Begnadigung. Zu der Zeit hatte der Staatsrat (Sangi) und Ben zur Rechten Fujiwara no Ason Momokawa Mitgefühl mit der flammenden Treue Kiyomaro's, teilte von seiner eigenen

*Lebenslandschaft im Lande Bingo 20 Hausstande ab und sandte (die Einkünfte) ihm als Gabe an den Ort seiner Verbannung.*<sup>7896</sup>

As it could be seen, the Nihon kôki chronicle lends a slightly different perspective to both the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and the Dôkyô Incident. While one could find criticism of the two men, the description of Emperor Shôtoku is rather positive. According to the chronicle, in the aftermath of the rebellion, there were 375 people who were caught as accomplices and were expecting their punishment. Apparently it was Hôkin who persuaded the emperor and thus prevented their execution. What is more important, however, is that Shôtoku “hörte darauf” (“listened to her”). From that, it could be concluded that the emperor was open to reason, even if the person giving her the advice was her subject.

On the matter of Emperor Shôtoku’s relationship with Dôkyô, Nihon kôki only explains that the monk received the “favor” (幸, the literal translation is “blessing”) of the sovereign. Similar to Shoku Nihongi, the authors of Nihon kôki did not speculate more than necessary about the nature of their relation. One could even say that the description here is much more neutral, as in Shoku Nihongi one sees the word “favor” (寵幸, chōkō) used to refer to the association between the monk and the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Anyway, the beginning of the narrative of the Dôkyô Incident gives a potential explanation of the suspicions of a conspiracy expressed by Emperor Shôtoku in her edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769). In the said proclamation, she exposed both Kiyomaro and Hôkin as liars without further explanation except that Hôkin’s words “greatly contravened reason.” In the Nihon kôki chronicle, one reads that before Kiyomaro’s departure for Usa, he met with Michi no Mabito Toyonaga, apparently Dôkyô’s former master. The latter’s words regarding Dôkyô’s potential ascension to the throne left a strong impression on Kiyomaro and thus predetermined the second Hachiman oracle. After that conversation, Kiyomaro was convinced that Dôkyô should never ascend the throne and he eventually took that belief to Usa. From that point of view, it should be no wonder that Hachiman’s second oracle strongly opposed the monk’s potential appointment as successor to the throne. Interestingly enough, Nihon kôki narrates that after Kiyomaro’s return from Usa and his report to the sovereign, Shôtoku “could not punish him with death”. Thus, the impression that the emperor had been a benevolent ruler who treasured her subjects is further strengthened. That view is reconfirmed when one reads that an Imperial messenger delivered the sovereign’s pardon shortly before Kiyomaro’s execution on Dôkyô’s orders.

According to Nihon kôki’s portrayal of the events, it turns out that Shôtoku had been a benevolent ruler who respected and trusted her subjects. On the other hand, the chronicle describes Dôkyô as the “villain” behind the first Hachiman oracle. Due to Shôtoku’s distrust of it and her reluctance to put Dôkyô on the throne, she sent Wake no Kiyomaro to Usa and he returned with the deity’s advice against the monk’s potential appointment as successor. In contrast to Shoku Nihongi, the Nihon kôki chronicle gives no explanation for Kiyomaro’s punishment. It only says that “The emperor could not punish him with death.” At the same time, there should have been a reason for Kiyomaro’s sentence. Considering the fact that the emperor sought a confirmation of the first oracle, it could be assumed that she was not blinded by Dôkyô and was reluctant to put him on the throne based only on a single oracle from a deity, being that even Hachiman. Therefore, it could not be said that Shôtoku punished Kiyomaro out of anger that he came back from Usa with a negative answer from Hachiman. Unfortunately, however, Nihon kôki does not give further explanation for the punishment of the Wake siblings, and thus leaves Shôtoku’s Imperial edict from 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) as the only source of information about the reasons. At the same time, it could be assumed that

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<sup>896</sup> Nihon kôki, transl. by Bohner 1940: 268/70

Kiyomaro's and Hôkin's supposed sins were not so serious as to be punished with death. After all, an Imperial messenger eventually delivered Shôtoku's pardon of Kiyomaro shortly before the latter's execution. All things considered, *Nihon kôki* lends a different perspective to the most important events from the reign of Emperor Shôtoku and to her portrayal as a person and a sovereign, and thus continues Shoku Nihongi's tendency to portray the last female ruler of Nara Japan in a good light. It could therefore be concluded that the political dynamics of the Heian period did not influence the general historical narrative in regard to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku.

### Fusô ryakuki and Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku

The next text from the Heian period to be discussed in this work would be *Fusô ryakuki*, a historical text compiled by the Buddhist monk Kôen at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Originally, the chronicle recorded the reigns of all emperors since that of the mythical Emperor Jimmu in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. up until Kanji 8 (1094), which coincided with the reign of Emperor Horikawa (r. 1087 – 1107). The chronicle consisted of 30 volumes in total, and sixteen of these are still extant (volumes 2 – 6 and 20 – 30). There are also abridged transcripts of the volumes 1 and 7 – 14. An important characteristic of *Fusô ryakuki* is the frequent quotation of sources such as the Six National Histories (六国史, *Rikkokushi*), diaries, *engi*, biographies of famous monks (僧伝, *sôden*), and temple traditions while reconstructing the history of Japan. At the same time, a strong emphasis on matters of particular interest for the Buddhist tradition could be noticed.<sup>897</sup> Another notable characteristic of Kôen's work is that it is compiled wholly in *kanbun*, something untypical of the era, considering that it was in the Heian period when both the *katakana* and the *hiragana* writing systems were created. Nevertheless, even though *kanbun* remained the official writing system of the court long after the end of the Heian period (it was used in Japan until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), sometimes the use of Chinese characters that had to be adapted to the Japanese grammar and syntax caused difficulties in the understanding of the text compiled in that particular way. The most common problems are shortly summarized by William C. Hannas in his book *Asia's Orthographic Dilemma* and namely: the different structure of the Japanese and the Chinese sentences; the need to parse the Chinese characters and to decide which of them should be read together; the need to decide how to pronounce the characters; and the need to find suitable equivalents for Chinese function words.<sup>898</sup> All things considered, it could be assumed that Kôen, similar to the authors of other old chronicles compiled in *kanbun*, also experienced difficulties of such nature during the compilation of his work. As a result, some ambiguities in both the narrative and the interpretation of the text could be expected. Nevertheless, even though *Fusô ryakuki* can not be described as the most objective historical text firstly due to the vocation of its author and then due to the writing system used for its compilation, it still became a basis for historical works from later times, for example, the Kamakura-period works *Mizukagami* and *Gukanshô*.

Now, one should turn to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal. As it could be seen from the chronicles of Emperor Kôken's reign, the initial description of the last female emperor of Nara Japan was that of an ardent supporter of Buddhism. The reports mostly narrate her involvement in religious activities which, interestingly enough, revolved around the deity Hachiman.<sup>899</sup> The chronicle from the the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 also describes her as a filial daughter.

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<sup>897</sup> See Britannica Kokusai Dai-Hyakkajiten: "Fusô Ryakuki" 扶桑略記

<sup>898</sup> Hannas 1997: 32

<sup>899</sup> See 扶桑略記 [Fusô ryakuki], 孝謙天皇 [Kôken-tennô]

“九天平寶字元年五月己酉二日日，太上天皇周忌也。請僧干五百餘人，於東大寺設齋焉。”

*[On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month (46<sup>th</sup> of the sexagenary cycle) of Tenpyô hôji 1, it was the anniversary of the Retired Emperor's death. More than 500 monks were invited to Tôdaiji in order to prepare the religious ceremony.]*<sup>900</sup>

Interestingly enough, there is no mention of Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy which was a central point of Emperor Kôken's reign and a matter of interest to other historical texts such as Shoku Nihongi. Considering the fact that such an important event was omitted while religious ceremonies, construction of temples and deities' worship were thoroughly narrated, it could be assumed that Kôen wanted to create an image of Emperor Kôken very much similar to that of other female rulers before her. Despite having been revered as emperors, they were regarded simply as throneholders, as temporary solutions to succession issues. That meant that their time on the throne was limited until the appearance of a suitable male successor. Such situation left those female rulers with little authority and even lesser responsibilities. They could either concentrate on their religious functions or devote their lives to the patronage of cultural activities as had been the case with Emperor Genmei during whose reign both Kojiki and Fudoki were compiled. From that point of view, it could be assumed that Kôen's portrayal of Emperor Kôken had been strongly influenced by the "standard" image of a female ruler.

A significant change in the description of the last female emperor of Nara Japan could be found after reading the chronicles of Emperor Shôtoku. It should be noted that Fusô ryakuki, similar to Shoku Nihongi, also refers to her as Emperor Takano. Then, among other things, one finds a short narrative of Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion.

“天平寶字八年甲辰，十月九日壬申，四十七即位。

同日，宣命，詔曰：「船親王は波，九月五日に爾，仲麿と止二人謀からく家良久。書作て互朝庭の乃咎計て互，將進と等謀けり家利。又仲麿が何家物計ふるに夫流爾，書中に爾仲磨と等通ける家流謀の乃文有。是以親王の乃名は波下て互，諸王と等成て互，隱岐國に爾流賜ふ布。又池田親王は波，此夏馬多集て天，事謀と止所聞き支。如是在事數多度阿麻多太比所奏。是以親王の乃名は波下賜て天，諸王として等志天，土左國に爾流賜ふと布等詔大命を乎聞食と止宣。」”

*[9<sup>th</sup> day (9<sup>th</sup> of the sexagenary cycle) of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (41<sup>st</sup> of the sexagenary cycle). She ascended the throne at the age of 47.*

*On the same day, an imperial edict was issued which read: [On the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, Imperial Prince Fune conspired together with Nakamaro. They intended to fabricate papers citing the Court's faults so they could advance with an army. Furthermore, Nakamaro had his various plans written and the Imperial Prince's name was also found among the papers. As a result, the Imperial Prince would be stripped of his title, his rank would be reduced to that of an ordinary prince, and he would be sent into exile in Oki no kuni. Furthermore, there were various reports, that this summer, Royal Prince Ikeda gathered many cavalrymen and plotted treason. As a result, he would be stripped of his royal title, his rank would be reduced to that of*

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<sup>900</sup> 扶桑略記 [Fusô ryakuki], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.5.2



*an ordinary prince, and he would be sent into exile in Tosa no kuni. Let all hear the words of this edict.]*<sup>901</sup>

According to the narrative, Nakamaro wanted to fabricate papers against the court and to use them as a justification for his rebellion. While the fate of Nakamaro is not recorded, it becomes clear that the emperor punished the Imperial Princes Fune and Ikeda who apparently had actively participated in the Prime Minister's plot. Thus, the initial "traditional" portrayal of a female ruler undergoes an abrupt change. In this chronicle, Emperor Shôtoku is described as a strong and decisive sovereign who did not hesitate to punish even members of the Imperial family who dared to oppose her.

Then, Fusô ryakuki proceeds to narrate the Dôkyô Incident, or rather the events after Wake no Kiyomaro's return from Usa.

“清麿上表云：「天皇依八幡大神夢告，遣和氣清丸參大神宮，令聽神教。即託宣云。【如天皇夢告，其言不異。】[...] 於是重託宣云：『夫神有大少好惡也，善神惡淫祀，貪神受邪幣。道鏡遍邪幣於群神，行權譎於佞黨，病天嗣之傾弱，憂狼奴之將興。神兵交鋒，鬼戰連年。彼眾我寡，邪強正弱。歎自威之難當，仰佛力之奇護。吾欲為紹隆皇緒濟國家，須寫一切經，及造佛像，誦最勝王經一萬卷，建立一伽藍，除凶逆於一日，固社稷於萬代。汝承此言，莫遺失矣。』清丸對大神，誓云：『國家平定以後，必奏後帝，奉果神願，粉身殞命，不錯神言。』清丸歸還奏之，具如神宣。爰道鏡大怒，解清麿官職，改姓名為穢麿，身降刑獄，遂流大隅國。道鏡迫使將殺清丸。俄敕使來，得脫其死矣。清丸腳痿不能起立，為拜八幡大神，乘輿即路。”

*[Kiyomaro's report to the Emperor said: [Due to a dream about the Great Deity Hachiman, the Emperor sent me, Kiyomaro, to the Hachiman Shrine, to humbly inquire the deity about its will. The oracle said: "My words are such as in the Emperor's dream." [...] The important oracle went further on: [In all deities, there is good and evil to be found. Good deities can be worshipped through evil and lewd rituals, and covetous deities could receive wicked offerings. Dôkyô continuously sent the deities wicked offerings and exercised authority with deceit and insincerity. Because of the ill Emperor's tilting will, sadly, it is the wolves which reign. It is a time, when the divine soldiers fight with the troops of evil. They are many, we are but a few; the evil is strong, whereas the justice is weak. It is hard to accept our indignity, but looking for Buddha's power will protect us. I wish for you to help the Emperor and the country. For that to happen, it is necessary to copy all old scriptures, to erect a Buddha statue, to chant 1000 scriptures of our most successful rulers and to build one temple. Only then would all evil be eradicated and its seeds will harden for 1000 years to come. Hear my words and convey them without missing anything and without mistake!] Kiyomaro vowed to the Great Deity: [After great peace is settled throughout the country and my heart has spoken to the Emperor, I will dedicate myself to prayers until I die, as You wish.] Kiyomaro returned to the capital and reported the deity's will to the Emperor. Therefore, Dokyô became furious, dismissed Kiyomaro from his government service, changed his name to Kitanamaro, sent him to prison and, finally, sent him into exile in Ôsumi no kuni. Dôkyô pursued Kiyomaro's death. Suddenly, an imperial edict came by a messenger, delivering the news of Kiyomaro's death sentence being revoked. Due to his*

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<sup>901</sup> 扶桑略記 [Fusô ryakuki], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.10.9

*paralysed feet, Kiyomaro could not stand up but because of his worship of the Great Deity Hachiman, he was carried in a palanquin.*<sup>902</sup>

Although the Fusô ryakuki's narrative is almost identical to that of Shoku Nihongi on matters concerning the historical accuracy of the incident, there are still some differences to be noted. First of all, it is interesting to see how the text describes Dôkyô. In one sentence, he is described as a person who "...continuously sent the deities wicked offerings and exercised authority with deceit and insincerity." Then, one finds an interesting description of the political situation at the time: "...it is the wolves which reign.", with the reason for that having been "the ill Emperor's tilting will". The narrative goes on to describe the difficult times in which one lived: "It is a time, when the divine soldiers fight with the troops of evil. They are many, we are but a few; the evil is strong, whereas the justice is weak." At the end, the narrative ends with the conclusion that "...looking for Buddha's power will protect us." Although there are certainly some Buddhist connotations to be seen, that does not change the fact that Dôkyô is described as a "wolf" (狼). The interpretation of the meaning hidden behind that word slightly differs according to the way in which it is written. Normally, the character 狼 is read "ookami" which means "wolf". However, if one writes "ookami" in hiragana or katakana (おおかみ or オオカミ), the meaning of the word slightly changes: it could be understood either as a reference to the biological species *Canis lupus* (Gray wolf) or as "womanizer". The said case highlights one of the problems which could emerge when a text is compiled completely in kanbun. While the writing style leaves room for speculation about both the author's intention and the interpretation of the word, it nevertheless becomes clear that Dôkyô is described in a bad light as either a greedy and merciless person or as one who fought his way through politics by underhanded means such as seduction.

In contrast to Dôkyô's description, however, that of Emperor Shôtoku attributes any potential faults of hers to her poor health which had apparently weakened her hold on the court and the government. Thus, Fusô ryakuki continues the tendency found in previous historical texts to portray Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in a rather good light. In that chronicle, however, one could see a gradation in her description from a "traditional" female ruler whose only duty was to perform religious rituals to a strong and competent sovereign who had to endure rebellions and her subjects' attempts to usurp the throne.

## Kamakura Period

### Political and cultural situation

#### The transition from court to military government and the Imperial House's struggle for authority

The Heian period ended with Taira's defeat and Minamoto no Yoritomo's establishment of his military government (bakufu), which practically made him the new powerholder in the country. The transition of power and authority from the hands of the nobles into those of the warriors became the distinguishing feature of the new Kamakura period which continued from 1192 to 1333.<sup>903</sup> In order to consolidate his newly acquired power, Minamoto no Yoritomo initiated some reforms, the purpose of which was to strengthen the authority of the central government which consisted of an administrative board Mandokoro (政所)<sup>904</sup>, a board of retainers Samurai-dokoro (侍所), and a prosecution board

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<sup>902</sup> 扶桑略記 [Fusô ryakuki], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.6.15

<sup>903</sup> See Mass 1990: 46/47

<sup>904</sup> See Mass 1990: 65

Monchûjo (問注所)<sup>905</sup>. On regional level, he confiscated estates in central and western Japan and appointed military governors (shugo) to rule over the provinces, and stewards (jitô) to supervise public and private affairs. However, despite all his efforts to establish himself as the new ruler of the land, Yoritomo could not completely crush the resistance of the Fujiwara. Until 1189, there remained branches of the family in the north which continued to resist the stewards appointed by the new government. Only after the subjugation of the last Fujiwara stronghold was the Minamoto family able to consolidate its power. As a result, two centers of authority were established, with the one being Heian-kyô, the seat of the emperor, and the other Kamakura, the center of the military government of the Minamoto.<sup>906</sup> In principle, the Imperial House continued to hold ultimate power over the whole land, in practice, however, it held only the estates over which it had direct jurisdiction. The newly organized military families felt a much deeper bond to the military government of the Minamoto and thus turned their eyes to Kamakura.

Unfortunately for Minamoto no Yoritomo, however, his successors were unable to hold on to the power which they inherited. After Yoritomo's death in 1199, his son Yoriie was "*not of the same mettle as [his] father, which meant that actual leadership fell to a coalition of vassals, itself an unstable arrangement*"<sup>907</sup>. By the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, a regency for the shôgun<sup>908</sup> was established in which the Hôjô family (a branch of the Taira that took the Minamoto side in the conflict between the two families) and its head controlled the military leader, thus rendering him a powerless figurehead. Thus, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Japan was practically divided into four centers of power – on one side, there were the emperor and the Retired Emperor, with the former being a marionette himself, on the other side stood the shôgun and his Hôjô regent, with the head of the military government having been controlled by his regent. Under such circumstances, a clash between the actual powerholders in the country, that is the Retired Emperor and the Hôjô regents, was inevitable. In 1221, a war between Retired Emperor Go-Toba and the second regent Hôjô Yoshitoki broke out that remained in history as the Jôkyû War. Despite the ambitions of the Imperial House to take back its control over the country, its forces were easily destroyed by the Hôjô, which showed that the emperor did not possess both the military power and the authority necessary to compete with the military families. What was worse, with this defeat the court lost all its remaining power and was brought under the direct control of the government in Kamakura.<sup>909</sup> Notwithstanding that the Hôjô practically usurped the power of both the shôgun and the emperor, their regency introduced significant changes in the administrative system of the land. In 1225, Hôjô Yasutoki, son of Yoshitoki and third regent, established the Council of State which consisted of him as the head and other military lords as members.<sup>910</sup> Thus, the other families were given the opportunity to exert authority and a form of collective leadership was established. Several years later, in 1232, Yasutoki and his government promulgated the Goseibai Shikimoku (御成敗式目), or Formulary of Adjudications, as the basic law of the state. Consisting of 51 articles, the first military code of law regulated the duties of shugo and jitô, and set guidelines on how to settle land disputes.<sup>911</sup> Thus, a huge step was made on the way to transition from court to military government.

At the same time, while struggling to strengthen its own hold on power within the country, the government completely neglected the events outside Japan's borders. The severed ties with China, a

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<sup>905</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 213, Figure 4.3

<sup>906</sup> See Mass 1990: 56/57

<sup>907</sup> Mass 1990: 67

<sup>908</sup> See Mass 1990: 67

<sup>909</sup> See Mass 1990: 71

<sup>910</sup> See Kawazoe 1991: 405

<sup>911</sup> See Mass 1990: 78

legacy from the Heian period, were not reinstated in the Kamakura period partly due to the bakufu's efforts to consolidate its power, partly due to the strengthening of the Japanese pirates who made the open sea a dangerous place for ships. Under such circumstances, the military government received news of the Mongols having taken control of the throne in China in 1268 and having established a new dynasty by the name of Yuan. Its new head Kublai Khan demanded tribute from Japan and threatened with severe consequences in the case of refusal.<sup>912</sup> The Japanese government rebuffed the demands by emphasizing their country's uniqueness as the land chosen by the gods, and started preparations for war. The answer of the Mongols, albeit somewhat delayed, came in 1274 when more than 900 ships carrying more than 23 000 troops disembarked in northern Kyûshû. Being skillful horsemen, the Mongols clearly had the advantage against the samurai accustomed to one-on-one combat. Fortunately for the Japanese, however, a sudden typhoon destroyed the invaders and saved the country.<sup>913</sup> Assessing his first defeat as one caused by natural forces and not by the opponent's military skills, Kublai Khan made a second attempt to conquer Japan in 1281. For a second time, however, the Mongol troops were defeated by the nature. Another typhoon struck the coast of northern Kyûshû and destroyed the invaders' ships, which effectively put an end to the Mongol intentions to conquer Japan.<sup>914</sup> While Shintô priests attributed the Mongol defeat to "divine wind" (神風, kamikaze) sent by the deities which protected Japan, the military government assessed the situation much more realistically. It had become evident that the country did not possess the experience, the technology and the military force to repel enemy invasions. At the same time, however, the bakufu took comfort from the fact that if the warriors in northern Kyûshû had not been there to fight the invading Mongol troops, Japan would have been conquered much before the typhoons had struck the coasts. Anyway, the two Mongol invasions, albeit unsuccessful, strained massively the economy of the country. On the one hand, new taxes for defensive preparations had to be collected. On the other hand, the lords whose troops prevented the invaders from continuing their march into the country unperturbed expected compensations for their losses as well as rewards for their contribution. The bakufu, however, was unable to give them lands, or for that matter any other rewards, thus bringing mass dissatisfaction upon itself. The government's inability to fight the economic crisis led to consequences on local level as the landlords were forced to rely more often on moneylenders for support. Bands of rônin (samurai without master) became a frequent occurrence to the point that they began to threaten the stability of the government. In an attempt to weaken the aftereffects of the crisis, the Hôjô sought the support of other big clans.<sup>915</sup> In order to prevent the dissatisfied nobles from returning to the emperor's side, they also allowed two Imperial lines (later known as Northern and Southern Court) to alternate on the throne.

The said method was successful until the ascension of Emperor Go-Daigo of the Southern Court in 1318. The sovereign wanted to overthrow the military government and made everything in his power to defy it to the point that he even took the liberty of naming his successor. As a result, the bakufu decided to

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<sup>912</sup> „From time immemorial, rulers of small states have sought to maintain friendly relations with one another. We, the Great Mongolian Empire, have received the Mandate of Heaven and have become the master of the universe. Therefore, innumerable states in far-off lands have longed to form ties with us. As soon as I ascended the throne, I ceased fighting with Koryo and restored their land and people. In gratitude, both the ruler and the people of Koryo came to us to become our subjects; their joy resembles that of children with their father. Japan is located near Koryo and since its founding has on several occasions sent envoys to the Middle Kingdom. However, this has not happened since the beginning of my reign. This must be because you are not fully informed. Therefore, I hereby send you a special envoy to inform you of our desire. From now on, let us enter into friendly relations with each other. Nobody would wish to resort to arms.”, Ishii 1991: 132

<sup>913</sup> See Ishii 1991: 138/140

<sup>914</sup> See Ishii 1991: 145/147

<sup>915</sup> See Ishii 1991: 148/149

sent the emperor into exile in 1331. However, Go-Daigo had strong supporters who rebelled against the government in Kamakura. Eventually, even Ashikaga Takauji, the commander sent to subdue the rebels, turned against the bakufu. At the same time, the eastern warlord Nitta Yoshisada also rebelled against the Hôjô who, pressed on all sides, had to accept their defeat.<sup>916</sup> After that, Go-Daigo initiated the so-called Kenmu Restoration with which he hoped to restore the authority of the court and to replace the military with a civil government. The emperor tried to redistribute the Hôjô lands among the military commanders who contributed to the defeat of the Kamakura government. In doing so, however, he completely excluded small warlords and warriors who assisted him throughout the war. Furthermore, the sovereign tried to restore civil government in the provinces by replacing the shugo and jitô with nobles and court bureaucrats, which left the military class without any actual income. To make matters worse, Go-Daigo imposed additional taxes on the samurai for the construction of his new palace. By the end of 1335, both the emperor and the nobles had lost the support of the warrior class. Ashikaga Takauji, who had initially turned against the Hôjô in order to help Go-Daigo, this time sided with the Northern Court against the emperor in a what remained in history as the Nanboku-chô period (War between the Southern and Northern Court) that lasted from 1336 to 1392. Go-Daigo was forced to flee from the capital in the first years of the war. In an attempt to seek reconciliation, he sent the Imperial regalia to Takauji, who used them to install the Northern Court contender supported by him on the throne. The new emperor assumed the name Kômyô. Ashikaga himself established his own line of shôguns and thus officially put an end to the Kamakura period.<sup>917</sup>

### Religious and cultural achievements

The cultural and religious developments during the Kamakura period reflected the turbulent nature of the era. Speaking of culture and arts, the literature concentrated on the monogatari (for example, Heike monogatari which narrated the rise and fall of the Taira clan), on the one hand, and works reflecting the Buddhist concepts of impermanence (for example, the Hôjôki), on the other hand. Another, more subtly presented genre was the poetry anthology. Shin Kokin Wakashû, the most famous work from the period, was compiled between 1201 and 1205 and consisted of twenty volumes with more than 2000 waka (a poetic form consisting of five lines with a total of 31 syllables).

The biggest change, however, occurred in the sphere of religion. Old schools such as Tendai and Shingon and traditional temples such as those in Nara continued to adapt and exert influence on both politics and culture. However, the authority of these old Buddhist schools was soon threatened by the emergence of six new sects: Pure Land school (Jôdô-shû, 浄土宗) established by Hônen; True Pure Land Buddhism (Jôdô Shinshû, 浄土真宗) by Shinran; Rinzai school (Rinzai-shû, 臨濟宗) by Eisai; Sôtô school (Sôtô-shû, 曹洞宗) by Dôgen; Nichiren school (Nichiren-shû, 日蓮宗) by Nichiren, and the “Time sect” branch of Pure Land Buddhism (Ji-shû, 時宗) by Ippen. The birth of so much new Buddhist schools of thought in a time of massive political changes and instability could not be considered extraordinary. Rather, it was namely the political circumstances in the country that directly influenced the establishment of the new religious sects. For example, the teachings of the Pure Land school were centered around the belief that there will never be a world which is not corrupt, so one must strive for rebirth in another plane of existence – the “Pure Land”.<sup>918</sup> Interestingly enough, that philosophy became closely entangled with the views on the fairer sex.

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<sup>916</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 183

<sup>917</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 185/187

<sup>918</sup> See The Three Pure Land Sutras, transl. by Inagaki 2003: xiii

“The belief in the hells came into the lives of the Japanese with the spread of Pure Land Buddhism and constituted a certain sort of intimidation. To believe in the existence of the hells was to have faith in the saving power of the buddhas. [...] Thus it [*Buddhism*] promoted a doctrine of individual salvation. The objects of salvation were always the weak members of society, a group that included women.”<sup>919</sup>

In order to support that concept, sutras that defined the female body as unclean and recognized childbirth and menstruation as sure signs of the pollution of the women were compiled and preached among the people. One such text is the Ketsubon-kyô (Blood-bowl Sutra) which tells the story of the mother of Mokuren, a disciple of Buddha famous for his supernatural powers.

“Mokuren is horrified to discover his mother suffering in the Blood Pond Hell and visits Buddha to inquire after a means for saving her. The Blood Pond Hell is described as follows:

All women fall into this hell because of their karma. [...] The red blood flows seven days every month, this is eighty-four days in twelve months. This is why it is called “moon water”. This “moon water” is extremely evil and unclean. However, this evil blood spills upon the ground sullyng the heads of the Earth Gods, thus invoking the wrath of those 98,072 gods. If poured into water, it pollutes the Water Gods; if disposed of in the mountain forests, it defiles the Mountain Gods. When women wash their soiled clothing in the rivers, the good folk living downstream, ignorant of their act, draw this water and with it prepare tea and rice to offer to the gods and buddhas. [...] Since women, by nature, soil the gods and buddhas, they will all fall into the Blood Pond Hell after they die.”<sup>920</sup>

While the True Pure Land school also preached about the salvation of the soul, monk Shinran’s school of thought did not share the Pure Land Buddhism’s severe attitude toward women. While the Jôdô Shinshû also accepted the social inferiority of the women, it didn’t concentrate on constantly emphasizing the impurity of the female. Instead, it promoted celibacy as one of the ways to search for and eventually attain enlightenment. As Judit Arokay points out,

“Daraus lassen sich zwar kaum Konsequenzen für die Behandlung der Frau auf der Ebene der Theorie ziehen, auch wird die soziale Unterlegenheit der Frau dadurch nicht in Frage gestellt. Für die Anhängerinnen dieses Glaubens aber bedeutete es eindeutig eine psychische Erleichterung, keine extreme Ablehnung als unreines, bedrohliches und für die männliche Heilserlangung gefährliches Wesen erfahren zu müssen und von Mönchen nicht gemieden und verstoßen zu werden.”<sup>921</sup>

In contrast to the former two school of thoughts, the Rinzai and Sôtô sects, later the two biggest Zen Buddhist schools in Japan, adopted a much more down-to-earth approach. The former’s teachings were based on the belief of kenshô (見性, “seeing one’s true nature”) which could be achieved through practices such as zazen (座禪, seated meditation)<sup>922</sup>, kôan (公案, stories used by a teacher to test his student’s understanding of Zen)<sup>923</sup>, and samu (作務, physical work done with mindfulness)<sup>924</sup>. The

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<sup>919</sup> Minamoto 1993: 95

<sup>920</sup> Minamoto 1993: 95

<sup>921</sup> Árokay 2003: 190

<sup>922</sup> See Rinzai – Obaku Zen: Zazen

<sup>923</sup> See Lachs 2012: 2

<sup>924</sup> See Temple Zen Ryumon Ji: Practicing Samu

Rinzai method of “seeing one’s true nature” through practice became popular among the warrior class, which won the school the fame as “samurai Zen”<sup>925</sup>. The Sôtô school focused on shikantaza (只管打坐, meditation with no objects, anchors, or content). The meditators “just sat” in a state of conscious awareness.<sup>926</sup> Interestingly enough, the school’s founder Dôgen was a supporter of the notion of gender equality.

“Im Shôbô genzô (1240) stellt er fest, dass sowohl Männer als auch Frauen den Weg erkennen können. Dies sollte das Ziel sein ohne Rücksicht auf das Geschlecht. Er kritisiert in Zusammenhang mit der Erleuchtungsfähigkeit die hierarchische Unterscheidung von Amtsträgern und Laien, Herren und Knechten, Alten und Jungen und eben auch Frauen und Männern. [...] Er spricht sich aus gegen das Eintrittsverbot für Frauen als etwas Lächerliches und weist die Fünf Hindernisse zurück.”<sup>927</sup>

The Nichiren school of thought was based mainly on the Lotus Sutra that preached that all beings had the potential to achieve enlightenment (or, to become Buddhas) in their current live.<sup>928</sup> Ippen’s Ji-shû was driven by the belief that for one to achieve enlightenment, one must completely reject one’s self and devote one’s self to Amida. The act of repeating Amida’s name would have been enough for the achievement of salvation.<sup>929</sup>

All things considered, all six schools centered their teachings on the current state of the land and its people. While the Pure Land and the True Pure Land schools preached that the current world was corrupted and irreformable to the point that one must seek salvation on another plane of existence, the Zen schools of Rinzai and Sôtô concentrated much more on the meditation as a way for one to learn more about one’s inner self. Interestingly enough, however, the former two also promoted the notion of the females’ social inferiority and corporal impurity, and excluded the women from the concept of enlightenment. At the same time, the Nichiren school rejected the Pure Land teachings about salvation in another world and preached much more about this-worldly ways for one to attain enlightenment. The “Time sect”, probably the most radical among all six, emphasized the importance of the repetition of the name of Amida Buddha as the surest way for one to reach salvation, and gave much more weight to the practice rather than to the concentration in order for one to learn about one’s inner self. Thus, in one way or another all six schools reflected the situation of the state in a turbulent era such as the Kamakura period.

### Kojidan’s satirical view on the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô

From the previous chapter, it became clear that the political circumstances of the Kamakura period strongly influenced both religion and literature. Similar to the Buddhist schools of thought, the written works also concentrated on matters such as the belief in salvation. In that aspect, the setsuwa collection Kojidan compiled by Minamoto no Akikane between 1212 and 1215 can be considered a clear example of a Kamakura-period work, as it showed the impurity of the world, thus fulfilling the expectations of the turbulent times. Akikane (1160 – 1215), a member of the Minamoto Genji clan,

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<sup>925</sup> „...Secondly, Zen discipline is simple, direct, self-reliant, self-denying; its ascetic tendency goes well with the fighting spirit. The fighter is to be always single-minded with one object in view: to fight, looking neither backward nor sidewise. He is therefore not to be encumbered in any possible way, be it physical, emotional, or intellectual.“, Suzuki 2019: 62

<sup>926</sup> See Koho 2000: 134

<sup>927</sup> Árokay 2003: 190

<sup>928</sup> See Overview of World Religions: Nichiren Buddhism

<sup>929</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia’s Kyoto Articles (h): The Ji Sect (時宗)

served as a chief administrator in the Ministry of Justice (刑部卿, Gyôbu-kyô). During that period, he was able to establish contacts with renowned figures such as the poet Fujiwara no Teika (1162 –1241) or the monk Eisai (1141 – 1215). Fujiwara no Teika’s influence as a poet, scholar, critic, novelist, and calligrapher had been enormous and he remained in history as the master of the waka form. One of his works is the Ogura hyakunin issû, an anthology of hundred poems by hundred different authors. The collection is regarded as a book of waka theory in which all types of ideal waka as well as their composing techniques were laid out. Teika also made many manuscript copies of Japanese classics such as The Tale of Genji, The Tales of Ise and the anthology Kokinshû.<sup>930</sup> On the other hand, monk Eisai was affiliated with the Tendai school of thought and is often credited with bringing both the Rinzaï school of Zen Buddhism and the green tea to Japan. In his attitude to both religion and the green drink, the monk followed the notion of finding inner peace and purity. His sermons gravitated toward the concept that practices such as zazen (座禪), kôan (公案), and samu (作務) were the only way for self-reflection and self-understanding, which eventually won him the sobriquet “Samurai Zen”. Speaking of Eisai’s connection to tea, he preferred to focus on the medicinal aspects of the drink.<sup>931</sup> The main reason for this was rooted in the common conception of the time that the world was in a state of mappô, the Latter Age of the Dharma, considered by many to be a time of decline. Thus, Eisai believed that the green tea could be used as a cure which could help the people to get through the difficult times.

All things considered, it could be assumed that Kojidan’s author Minamoto no Akikane had been a person with versatile interests and, most likely, vast knowledge of many spheres of life. It should therefore be no wonder that he decided to leave behind the intrigues and political infightings at court and to devote himself to the religion at the age of 52. Thus, he compiled his work Kojidan as a tonsured Buddhist monk. The collection encompasses the time between the Nara period and the Middle Heian period and consists of 462 stories arranged chronologically. The narratives are divided into six volumes with each one following a certain theme: “Stories about righteous rule, emperors and empresses”, “Stories about loyalty”, “Stories about monks”, “Stories about brave men”, “Stories about shrines and temples”, and “Stories about art and artistic accomplishments”.<sup>932</sup> Probably due to the influence of Fujiwara no Teika, Minamoto no Akikane compiled his work mainly in kanji, but sentences written in kana could also be found scattered throughout the text. Generally based on anecdotes, folklore traditions, or even stories recounted by servants in noble households, Kojidan also cites works such as Fusô ryakuki, Ôki (also Shûyûki, the diary of Fujiwara no Sanesuke), or Fukego (a collection of sayings compiled by Fujiwara no Tadazane) as some of its sources. In contrast to similar works from that time, Kojidan does not pay much attention to the old ways and traditions and reveals the secrets of emperors and nobles alike by even disregarding the official history, thus closing the gap between the common people and the high-class society.<sup>933</sup> Considering the fact that Akikane became a monk at the age of 52, it could be expected that his stories would have Buddhist connotations, that is to say that the sins and the failures would be used as an example of deeds that ought to not be done if one wanted to attain enlightenment. At the same time, in his attempt to convey these beliefs, Akikane’s portrayals of historical figures could often be regarded as disrespectful, as is the case with the description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku.

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<sup>930</sup> See Waka Poetry: Fujiwara no Teika

<sup>931</sup> See Graham 1999: 5/6

<sup>932</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (c): Kojidan (古事談)

<sup>933</sup> See Japanese-English Bilingual Corpus of Wikipedia's Kyoto Articles (c): Kojidan (古事談)



“称徳天皇【聖武御女（むすめ）、母は光明皇后不比等女なり、初め孝謙天皇、後称徳と号す、又た高野姫と号す】、道鏡の陰、猶ほ不足に思し食（め）されて、薯蕷（やまのいも）を以て陰形を作り、之れを用みしめ給ふ間、折れ籠（こ）もる、と云々。よりて腫れ塞がり、大事に及ぶ時、小手の尼（百濟の医師、其の手嬰兒の手の如し）見奉りて云はく、「帝の病愈（い）ゆべし、手に油を塗り、之れを取らむと欲（おも）ふ」と。爰（こ）こに右中弁百川【宇合（うまかひ）二男、式部卿参議、淳和外祖、旅子贈皇太后宮の父、贈太政大臣正一位】、「靈狐なり」と云ひて、劍を抜き、尼の肩を切る、と云々。よりて療（い）ゆること無く、帝崩ず。”

*[Emperor Shôtoku [daughter of Emperor Shômu and Empress Kômyô, the daughter of [Fujiwara no] Fuhito; first ruled as Emperor Kôken and then as Emperor Shôtoku; also called Takano-hime] thought Dôkyô's sex organ to be lacking and made herself a phallus from the root of a Japanese yam. However, as she used it, the phallus broke in her. Consequently, it swelled and got stuck. As the situation became critical, the Emperor called for Ote-no-ama [a doctor from Kudara, called thus because of her hands which were like those of a baby]. The doctor examined her and said: "The Emperor's illness could be cured, if I oil my hands and pull the thing out." Upon hearing this, Uchûben Momokawa [second son of Umakai; state councilor, responsible for court ceremonies; Emperor Junna's maternal grandfather and father of Great Empress Tabiko; posthumously rewarded with the title Dajô-daijin and Senior First rank] said: "What a sly fox that nun is!", drew his sword and cut her head off. As a result, the Emperor could not be cured and died.]<sup>934</sup>*

As it could be seen from this satirical narrative, Akikane created the impression that Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô had been lovers, thus completely disregarding the official history. Regardless of whether the author wanted to portray the historical figures as “normal humans” with their flaws and imperfections, or he wanted to underline his view that such a close relationship between a religious figure and a ruler was inappropriate, the general tone and word choice utilized by him are close to disrespectful. On the one hand, there was no historical evidence whatsoever that the relation between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô was more than a political collaboration. Moreover, even if there was love between the monk and the emperor, it was highly unlikely, to say impossible, that anyone except her and her lover could be present in her chambers so that person could assess their love life. From that point of view, a description of the size of Dôkyô's genitals or Shôtoku's way to satisfy her needs of the flesh could be considered disrespectful. While an offense to a monk from a humble background who also supposedly tried to usurp the throne through a false oracle could be accepted as a reflection of the general sentiment toward him, the reason for such critical portrayal of an emperor could not be easily comprehended. Moreover, the said ruler had been related by blood to the Fujiwara clan to which Akikane also belonged. From that point of view, one could expect a somewhat positive description of the last female emperor of Nara Japan. On the contrary, she is portrayed as a sinful woman with excessive needs of the flesh that eventually led to her death, which completely ignores not only the official history but also the respect to which the members of the Imperial family are due. One could argue that Akikane found certain connotations of the intimate relationship between Shôtoku and Dôkyô in historical texts, and simply decided to “embellish” the story in order to make it more interesting for the readers. However, considering that Fusô ryakuki is the only historical source officially cited in Kojidan, such a theory could be rejected. In the said chronicle, one sees a negative

<sup>934</sup> 古事談 続古事談 [Kojidan/Zoku Kojidan]: 称徳天皇 [Shôtoku-tennô]

description of Dôkyô but a rather positive one of Emperor Shôtoku. Moreover, in it, one could not find even the slightest assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the monk and the emperor.

All in all, Kojidan's rather critical description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku could not be attributed simply to the genre of the text or to the personal sentiments of the author toward the last female emperor of Nara Japan. If one compares Akikane's portrayal with the one in another setsuwa collection, Nihon ryôiki, it could be assumed that the nature of Emperor Shôtoku's and Dôkyô's relationship had been a matter of interest to common people, nobles, and Buddhist clergy alike. The reason for that is most likely rooted in the fact that the emperor's support of the monk could be regarded as her biggest flaw during both her first and second period on the throne. While both her reign as Emperor Kôken and that as Emperor Shôtoku were politically turbulent mostly due to some courtiers' dissatisfaction with the situation in which a woman occupied the Imperial throne, the last emperor of Nara Japan overcame these obstacles thanks to her sharp wit and strong will. Regardless of the nobles' opinion on the matter, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku proved herself as a capable sovereign who could have been considered equal to, or even better than, her male counterparts. From that point of view, her constant support of Dôkyô and his elevation to the second-highest position in the state remained a mystery for many. Moreover, regardless of whether Shôtoku's relationship with Dôkyô was a political one in which she used the monk and his family to counterbalance the Fujiwara influence at court, or it had been a love affair, as a ruler, she wasn't obligated to explain herself before her subjects. As a result, many courtiers, and most surely the common people, saw only the outer layer of the situation, that is the constant political elevation of the Buddhist monk and the emperor's favoritism toward him. For them, such actions could be explained by something more than Dôkyô's political ability or his intelligence, and that could have been namely the existence of a romantic relationship between the female emperor and the Buddhist monk. It could only be speculated whether the criticism of the potential love affair between Shôtoku and Dôkyô would have been so strong if it were not for the Dôkyô Incident. Anyway, considering the fact that both Shôtoku and Dôkyô were tonsured lay Buddhists, a physical relationship between them would have still been a sin, but one could argue whether a "simple" immoral transgression would have attracted so much negativity if it were not the Dôkyô Incident which served to prove that the lack of moral in one or two persons could eventually lead to catastrophic consequences for the whole country. From that point of view, one could understand the portrayals of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in the setsuwa stories. Compiled by Buddhist monks, these stories often took upon themselves the duty to not only entertain the people but also to point out sins and wrongdoings which could hinder one in one's efforts to attain enlightenment. As Nihon ryôiki's compiler monk Kyôkai argued, he assumed it his responsibility to *"offer [his] hand to lead them to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil"*<sup>935</sup> by the means of his setsuwa collection. In a politically turbulent time such as the Kamakura period, that belief had surely become even stronger. From that point of view, the potential love relationship between a nun, who happened to have been also an emperor, and a monk, who was elevated to unheard political heights, was sinful and the surest sign of one's inner corruption, and therefore had to be openly criticized.

Interestingly enough, notwithstanding the fact that the portrayal of Kôken/Shôtoku in both Kojidan and Nihon ryôiki is critical, it is actually Dôkyô who becomes the target of direct ridicule. While in Nihon ryôiki one reads that

*"Don't be contemptuous of monks because of their robes*

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<sup>935</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [6]/[7]

*For under their skirts are hung garters and hammers.*

*When the hammers erect themselves,*

*The monks turn out to be awesome lords.*<sup>936</sup>

in Kojidan's narrative one finds that "...*Takano-hime thought Dôkyô's sex organ to be lacking...*". Akikane's description of the "lacking" Dôkyô could be considered insulting in many senses. Firstly, it is insinuated that a tonsured Buddhist monk broke his vows and had a physical relationship with a woman. Secondly, the impression is created that he was incapable as a man. Considering the fact that the two setsuwa collections discussed in this work were compiled by Buddhist monks, as was actually the case with the majority of them, it is interesting that Dôkyô's most ardent enemies had actually been his "colleagues". At the same time, considering Dôkyô's origins, his area(s) of expertise and knowledge, as well as the way of his entry into the political world of the country, there could have been several reasons for the clergy's negative sentiments toward him. Firstly, he was a person from a humble (and unclear) background. Even if there was something true in the theory that the Yuge were connected with the Mononobe clan, Dôkyô would still have been considered a descendant of a family infamous for its hatred of Buddhism. The negative sentiments toward the newly imported religion were actually one of the reasons why the Mononobe were eventually crushed by the Soga clan. From that point of view, in the eyes of any faithful Buddhist believer, Dôkyô would have been a hypocrite who, despite his roots and his ancestors' history with Buddhism, chose to follow the Way of Buddha. There was no way for such a man to have truly believed in the Buddhist doctrine. In a sense, the rumors about the potential love relationship between him and Emperor Shôtoku would have served to prove that opinion. Secondly, Dôkyô's vast knowledge could also be considered untypical of a Buddhist monk. After all, ambition was regarded as one of the sins which obstructed one's way to enlightenment. Comparing the areas of expertise of Dôkyô, Kyôkai, Kûkai and Saichô (all monks whose lives had been more or less discussed in the current work), it could be assumed that Dôkyô had had the most unusual education among the four of them. Moreover, while Kyôkai, Kûkai and Saichô were considered educated persons, their knowledge remained constricted to areas closely related to Buddhism and the ways to attain enlightenment. In contrast, Dôkyô knew Sanskrit, was proficient in Zen meditational practices, mastered sutras and techniques which could bring peace to one's soul and, last but not least, knew about the Chinese horoscope method Xiuyaojing which utilized the zodiac, the seven luminaries and the 28 constellations in order to read the human fate. As it could be seen, Dôkyô's education was religious, but it also included some areas of knowledge which could be considered esoteric and not necessarily needed by a monk whose only purpose in life would have been to serve Buddha. As it turned out, it was namely that untypical education which paved Dôkyô's way for his entry into politics – another reason for criticism of him. Typically, a monk's duty was to serve Buddha by leading a humble life devoted to the temple and his fellow monks and by helping the people rid themselves of their sinful desires in their pursuit of enlightenment. From that point of view, Dôkyô's entry into politics and his rise to power could be considered not only too ambitious for a member of the Buddhist clergy but also a betrayal of his fellow monks, who had devoted their lives to Buddha and to the people. All things considered, Dôkyô had been an anomaly among the Buddhist clergy, and a rather dangerous one at that. His life, knowledge and rise to political power could have potentially compromised the image of the Buddhist monks as faithful and humble people whose only purpose in life was to serve Buddha and to stay away from all things secular, and eventually namely such a thing happened after the Dôkyô Incident occurred. From that point of view, one could understand the strong negative sentiment toward Dôkyô shared by his fellow Buddhist monks.

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<sup>936</sup> Nihon ryôiki, transl. by Nakamura 1997: 277/278

## Muromachi Period

### Political peculiarities of the period reflected through the eyes of a courtier

As it was briefly sketched in the previous chapter, the political turmoils typical of the Kamakura period came to an end after the defeat of the Hôjô by the hands of Emperor Go-Daigo and his supporters. The unwise policy of the emperor, however, alienated him from namely those persons who had stood on his side against the military government of Minamoto/Hôjô. Eventually, Ashikaga Takauji supported a member of the so-called Northern Court against Go-Daigo and dethroned him, thus putting his own protégé on the throne and establishing his own military government. At that time, a certain courtier, who remained in history mostly with the compilation of his history of the Imperial succession *Jinnô shôtôki*, accompanied the exiled Go-Daigo and served as living witness to the war between the Southern and the Northern Court that marked the opening years of the Muromachi period extending from 1336 to 1573. The courtier's name was Kitabatake Chikafusa. Kitabatake belonged to a branch of the Murakami Genji clan descended from Prince Tomohira, son of Emperor Murakami (r. 946 – 967). Despite their blood connection with the Imperial family, the Murakami Genji had little opportunity for political advancement at court due to the fact that the Fujiwara and their allies had occupied all important state positions. The latter's weakening in the middle and later Heian period, however, allowed the strengthening and gradual rise to prominence of other families such as that of Kitabatake Chikafusa. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, the head of the family, Michichika, served the Retired Emperor Go-Toba and could thus rise to the position of Minister of the Center. The grandson of Michichika, Masaie, eventually became the founder of the Kitabatake branch of the Murakami Genji family. *Jinnô Shôtôki*'s author, Chikafusa, was born in 1293 as the great-grandson of Michichika. He became the head of the family at the age of 13 due to his father's decision to become a Buddhist monk. In 1315, Chikafusa withdrew from public life after the death of his grandfather, only to return to court three years later after Emperor Go-Daigo's ascension. Before him, the heads of his family hadn't risen higher than provisional major counselor (*gon-dainagon*). However, Chikafusa was favored by the new emperor and in 1324, only a year after he was appointed *gon-dainagon*, he was elevated to the position of major counselor (*dainagon*). At the same time, he was made a head (*bettô*) of the Junnain and Shôgakuin Temples. As another sign of his favor, the emperor made Chikafusa tutor of his infant son Prince Yoyoshi. However, the prince died in 1330 and the mourning Chikafusa, then at the age of 37, decided to take the tonsure and to retire from the political life of the country. Nothing was heard from monk Sôgen, as Chikafusa's Buddhist name was, for the next three years. In the 10<sup>th</sup> month of 1333, however, he accompanied his son Akiie to the northern provinces, where the latter was appointed to the position of governor of the province Mutsu. It is widely believed that during the three years from 1330 to 1333, Kitabatake Chikafusa played an important role in the events which led to the overthrow of the Kamakura Bakufu and the beginning of the Kenmu Restoration. Paul H. Varley, however, questions those opinions due to the lack of evidence of Chikafusa's appointment to any important court position even after his return to public life in 1333. Varley even argues that Kitabatake had apparently been strongly against the restoration, that is against Emperor Go-Daigo's policy directed at the strengthening of the Imperial authority.<sup>937</sup>

Nevertheless, Ashikaga Takauji, the general who turned against the Kamakura bakufu in 1333 and thus gave the emperor the opportunity to strike back, eventually decided to overthrow Go-Daigo and left in a hurry for the Kantô area. The Imperial army was defeated by the Ashikaga chieftain, and Akiie, Kitabatake's son, was forced to leave his dominion Mutsu at the end of 1335. Upon his arrival in Kyôto in early 1336, he was able to push Ashikaga Takauji's forces back to Kyûshû. It seemed that Kitabatake Chikafusa returned to the capital seven months before his son and was thus a witness to the events

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<sup>937</sup> See *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 1/3

which unfolded there. In the 5<sup>th</sup> month of 1336, Takauji returned from Kyûshû with reinforcements and was able to defeat the Imperial army. Emperor Go-Daigo was forced to seek refuge on Mount Hiei. He returned several months later in an attempt to seek reconciliation with Ashikaga Takauji, but in fact only managed to practically “transfer” a copy of the Imperial regalia to Emperor Kômyô of the Northern branch of the Imperial family. Two months after that event, Go-Daigo proclaimed himself the rightful emperor and established the Southern court, thus officially setting the beginning of the Nanboku-chô period which continued until 1392. In the meantime, Chikafusa had gone to the Ise region sometime in 1336, and it seemed that he had devoted himself to preparing the way for Go-Daigo’s flight to Yoshino at the end of the year. In 1338, he joined a group that included his son Akinobu and Prince Noriyoshi, who later became Emperor Go-Murakami. The group departed by sea for the eastern and northern provinces. While the prince and Akinobu surely wanted to reach Mutsu, Kitabatake’s destination remained unknown. Anyway, due to a storm, the boat of Prince Noriyoshi and Akinobu was blown back to Ise. Chikafusa, on the other hand, was able to reach the coast of Hitachi. After a period of fleeing from war, Kitabatake was eventually able to settle in Oda castle which belonged to Oda Haruhisa, a supporter of the Southern court. It is believed that during that period (he stayed there from the 10<sup>th</sup> month of 1338 until the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1341), Kitabatake Chikafusa devoted himself to the task of supporting the cause of the Southern court. Eventually, he had to leave Oda castle due to its owner’s desertion to the Northern court’s side. In 1344, Chikafusa reached Yoshino where he served as chief administrator of the Southern court. After the latter’s occupation of Kyôto in 1352, Chikafusa went to the capital only to be driven away from there several months later. In the next year, the Southern court managed to recapture the city, but its keenest supporter had already died at the age of sixty without being able to see it.<sup>938</sup>

The military conflicts between the two courts continued until 1392 and in the meantime, the military government established by Ashikaga Takauji tried to gain a foothold in this turbulent political situation. As a matter of fact, Takauji was partly responsible for the division within the Imperial family, as he had been the one who turned against Emperor Go-Daigo and helped Emperor Kômyô of the Northern Court to ascend the throne. Even though the Ashikaga shôgunate could be considered a government that enjoyed the support of both the warrior class and the nobles due to it consisting of members of the Ashikaga family, on the one hand, and to its hold on the Northern Court, on the other hand, it was much more unstable than the Kamakura shôgunate had been. The reasons for that could be found namely in the constant military conflicts between the two courts which were nominally put to an end only by the time of the third shôgun Yoshimitsu (r. 1368 – 1394). In order to stabilize the order in the provinces, the Ashikaga government allowed the military governors (shugo) a relative autonomy in their respective estates<sup>939</sup>, and by having done so they unintentionally prepared the scene for the appearance of the daimyo during the Edo period. Despite thus having strengthened the bond between the government and the provincial lords, the bakufu was unable to consolidate its own power, mainly due to the continuing division within the Imperial House that didn’t vanish despite Ashikaga Yoshimitsu’s promises from 1392 for greater balance between the two branches. In fact, little changed after the end of the Nanboku-chô period, and the Northern Court continued to hold onto the throne, which only widened the rift within the Imperial family. Unfortunate for the Ashikaga shôgunate was also the fact that Yoshimitsu could not overcome the political problems during his reign and his successors were too weak for that. They gradually lost their hold on the regional lords and the imperial succession to the point that the daimyô became strong enough to support their own candidates for the throne. In time, signs of the weakening initially seen only on regional level could be observed even

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<sup>938</sup> See Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 3/7

<sup>939</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 192/193

inside the reigning family.<sup>940</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> shōgun Yoshimasa had no heir – a problem which set the beginning of a series of internal struggles inside the bakufu which remained in history as the Ōnin War. The conflict that continued from 1467 until 1477 left Heian-kyō in ruins and practically put an end to the authority of the shōgunate. It opened opportunities for other military lords who, unobstructed by the government, could fight among themselves over power and territory. Eventually, an official end to the Ashikaga shōgunate as well as the civil war (Sengoku period) was put by Oda Nobunaga after he managed to emerge victorious over his other opponents in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1560s – 1580s).<sup>941</sup>

## Cultural developments

In cultural aspect, the Muromachi period introduced many innovations which left a lasting impression on the Japanese society for centuries to come. As it was already mentioned, Zen Buddhism enjoyed the support of the warrior class since the establishment of Zen schools such as the Rinzai sect during the Kamakura period. That tendency also continued during the Muromachi period. Zen played an important role in the development not only of architecture, literature, poetry, tea ceremony, flower arranging but also of entertainment such as the Nō theater, Kyōgen (comic theater), or folk entertainment (sarugaku).<sup>942</sup> Due to its closeness to the bakufu, on the one hand, and to the Chinese culture, on the other hand, Zen Buddhism could be regarded as the bridge which contributed to the reestablishment of the relations between Japan and the continent, most especially China.

Shintō also underwent massive changes. Due to the lack of clear ideology, the indigenous beliefs of the people were nearly engulfed by Shingon Buddhism during the Kamakura period. Nevertheless, the Mongol invasions from the 12<sup>th</sup> century became a turning point for Shintō. The strong faith in the role of the kamikaze in the defeat of the enemy naval forces brought new hope for the indigenous beliefs of the people and their survival on the religious scene massively dominated by Buddhism. That hope was reflected in Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō Shōtōki* which emphasized the importance of the Imperial line's divine descent for the future of the country.<sup>943</sup>

The Muromachi period remained in history as the epoch during which schools and academies flourished. Having been able to consolidate their hold on the political world, the samurai quickly realized that military power alone could not support their authority in the long term. Therefore, they began to develop interest in academic disciplines such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. As a result, academies and schools were established throughout the country, with the Ashikaga Gakkō the most famous among them.<sup>944</sup>

Among all these cultural and religious developments, however, the Muromachi period welcomed the introduction of a whole new religion which played an important role in the socio-political development of the state during the following Edo period. That religion was the Christianity. In 1549, a small group of Portuguese Jesuits led by Francis Xavier reached Kagoshima with hopes to establish a Christian community in the island state. The daimyō of Satsuma Shimazu Takahisa welcomed the foreigners with open arms, partly due to his desire to cement his contacts with the Portuguese merchants, partly due to his wish to oppose the strong Buddhist faction in his province.<sup>945</sup> The initial plan of the Jesuits was first to convert the people of Satsuma and then to continue to the capital where they hoped to

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<sup>940</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 209/216

<sup>941</sup> See Hall (a) 1990: 228/230

<sup>942</sup> See Ishida 1963: 417

<sup>943</sup> See *Jinnō shōtōki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 7

<sup>944</sup> See Wiegand/Davis 2015: 321

<sup>945</sup> See López-Gay 2003: 102/103

persuade the emperor to support the new religion. However, Xavier and his people soon understood that their dream would be much harder to achieve than they had imagined. The country was at the beginning of a civil war in which the provincial lords fought each other over territory and the sovereign had no power to contain their ambitions. Then, upon his arrival at Kyôto in December 1550, Xavier was disappointed to learn that “*the Emperor of Japan was living in obscurity and was a mere figurehead without any political power of influence*”.<sup>946</sup> Thus, after an unsuccessful attempt to meet the ruler of the state, Xavier decided to settle in Yamaguchi. In order to be able to convey his beliefs to the people, he tried to establish contacts with the Shingon school, the ideology of which he found very similar to Christianity. However, he was soon forced to abandon the idea upon learning that despite the supposed similarities in ceremony between Catholicism and the Buddhist school of thought, the differences in the doctrines of the two teachings had been much more.<sup>947</sup> As a result, he drastically changed his positive attitude toward the Shingon school and began to criticize the Buddhist ideology in general, which won him many enemies among the clergy and the common people. After traveling across the country, in 1551, Xavier, invited by the daimyo of Bungo Ôtomo Yoshihige Sôrin, settled in the domain’s capital Funai for the short span of forty-six days before his departure for India.<sup>948</sup> Despite his disappointment with his inability to fully disseminate Christianity in Japan, Xavier was not angry at the country and its people. Before his departure, he left a brief for his successor Cosme de Torres in which he expressed his generally good impression of the island country.<sup>949</sup> All in all, the arrival of Francis Xavier in Kagoshima in 1549 marked the beginning of an era strongly marked by the Jesuit presence in the country as well as the daimyô’s attempts to restrict the growing influence of the new religion.

## Jinnô Shôtoki and the divinity of the Imperial House

### Kitabatake Chikafusa and his idea of shinkoku

The first draft of Kitabatake Chikafusa’s lifework Jinnô Shôtoki was written in 1339 during his stay at Oda castle. It was believed that he used an Imperial genealogy as a reference. The end version appeared four years later, in 1343, and from that moment on Jinnô shôtoki enjoyed, as H. Paul Varley explains, great “*fame and popularity in the Japanese tradition*”.<sup>950</sup> According to Varley, there are several reasons for that.

“One reason for this is that, in contrast to most Japanese historical writing before the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), Jinnô Shôtoki is also a polemical tract whose author dealt forthrightly, even though often dogmatically, with major issues in social and political affairs. Another reason is that the last section of Jinnô Shôtoki is a firsthand account of one of the most controversial events in pre-modern Japanese history, the dynastic schism within the

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<sup>946</sup> Kshetry 2008: 42

<sup>947</sup> See Batchelor 2021: 167; Kim 2004: 81; Lehmkuhl 2019: 99/102

<sup>948</sup> See Kshetry 2008: 43; Bentley 2019: 114

<sup>949</sup> The original text of the letter could be found in 日本キリシタン史 [History of the Christianity in Japan] from Ebisawa Arimichi (海老沢有道 1966: 66): “*The Japanese people are generally good-natured, free of malice, and very pleasant to interact with. Their sense of honor is very strong, and they value their honor above anything else. In general, the Japanese are poor, but neither the samurai nor the townspeople are ashamed of their poverty. [...] No matter how poor the samurai are and how rich the townspeople are [...] a samurai would never marry a commoner. This is because they believe that they will lose their honor by doing so. In other words, they respect their honor more than gold and silver. The Japanese have a whole set of customs to which they adhere in their interactions. They cannot stand insults and ridicule. The Japanese live moderately but when it comes to drinking, they tend to go overboard.*”

<sup>950</sup> Jinnô shôtoki, transl. by Varley 1980: 1

imperial family that led to a protracted period of war between two rival courts from 1336 until 1392. Chikafusa himself was a leading figure in the first half of this war.

But by far the most important reason for fame and popularity of Jinnô Shôtôki over the centuries is that its basic theme is the history of the imperial succession. To many later generations of Japanese, even up to World War II, Jinnô Shôtôki was the great catechism for loyalty to the throne. Although the kind of loyalty that had its classical expression in Jinnô Shôtôki was historically discredited by Japan's defeat in the war, Chikafusa's work remains a historical record of major importance. It is essential reading for all who wish to inquire into the history of the Japanese imperial institution."<sup>951</sup>

As H. Paul Varley rightfully points out, a big portion of Jinnô shôtôki's popularity is rooted in the fact that it is a history of the imperial succession. In it, the subject of the descent of the Imperial line from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu takes a central place. Moreover, it is insinuated that the close connection between the deities and the Japanese rulers ensured an eternal divine protection for Japan, thus turning it into a shinkoku (divine land).

"Jinnô Shôtôki begins with the famous lines: "Great Japan is the divine land (shinkoku). The heavenly progenitor founded it, and the sun goddess bequeathed it to her descendants to rule eternally. Only in our country it is true; there are no similar examples in other countries. This is why our country is called the divine land." In these bold terms Chikafusa enunciated the fundamental conditions underlying the credo that inspired the writing of Jinnô Shôtôki: (1) Japan is superior to other countries; (2) it is superior because it is a shinkoku; and (3) it is a shinkoku because it has enjoyed an unbroken continuity of rule from the time of its bequeathal by the sun goddess, Amaterasu.

The idea of Japan as a shinkoku – a divine land or land of the kami – is based, of course, on the mythical accounts of its origins in Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) and Nihon Shoki (or Nihongi; The Chronicle of Japan)."<sup>952</sup>

Initially, the idea of shinkoku was not regarded as strongly as it had been during Chikafusa's lifetime, the reason for that being that Japan from previous epochs was influenced by other impulses coming from the continent such as Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism and the difficulties which came about after the introduction of these new philosophies. For example, the import and further development of Buddhism slowly forced Shintô and its kami to step back from the religious life of the state, and the idea of chingo kokka (protection of the country by Buddhist deities) was established. As Varley explains,

"Chingo kokka was most fully implemented by Emperor Shômu during the Nara period (710-84) in the founding of Tôdaiji Temple in Nara as a state-supported, central see for administration of a network of provincial temples (kokubunji) and nunneries (kokubunniji) throughout the country. Even after the reduction of direct Buddhist influence in state affairs after the move of the capital to Heian in 794, the idea of chingo kokka was independently perpetuated by temples such as Enryakuji, which was located on Mount Hiei to the northeast of Heian (the direction from which malevolent spirits were thought to intrude), and which offered itself as a tangible guardian of the new capital city and, by extension, of the state itself."<sup>953</sup>

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<sup>951</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 1

<sup>952</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 7

<sup>953</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 8



As it was already discussed, after the Mongol invasions from 1274 and 1281, the chingo-kokka idea was supplanted by an interpretation of shinkoku that emphasized Japan's connection with the native kami which apparently had sent the divine wind (kamikaze). This shift in ideologies was accompanied by the revived idea of the heavenly lineage of the Imperial House. According to Varley, in his work, Kitabatake Chikafusa emphasized several points which could be considered crucial to the shinkoku ideology:

“Commenting on the 1281 invasion in Jinnô Shôtôki, [...] Chikafusa then added: “We can see in these events how unalterable is Amaterasu's mandate that the imperial line shall rule our country eternally.”<sup>954</sup>

This shift in emphasis from divine protection to continuity of imperial descent was accompanied in Jinnô Shôtôki by open assertions of the superiority of Japan to other countries. For example, after discussing the creation story according to Indian mythology and noting certain resemblances to Japan's own cosmological myth, Chikafusa observed that, whereas Japan had always been under the same dynasty, rulership in India had frequently been interrupted, and at times even people of base origins had been allowed to rise to supreme control of the land.

China also tended strongly toward disorder, mainly because the early rulers, despite their other achievements, had failed to establish a single, immutable dynastic line.

[...] In addition to asserting that Japan was superior to China because it had avoided the disorders of dynastic change, Chikafusa claimed (or at least strongly implied) that Japan was actually the older, and therefore the senior, of the two countries. [...] Another way in which Chikafusa proclaimed Japanese superiority to China was on the grounds that Japan maintained the great philosophic and religious traditions of East Asia intact even though they were threatened or allowed to decline in China. He asserted, for example, that when the first emperor of Ch'in, Shih Huang, burned Confucian books and buried scholars alive, the complete works of Confucianism existed thereafter only in Japan.”<sup>955</sup>

Jinnô Shôtôki's structure could be considered a confirmation of Varley's view. Unlike any other major history from the Heian or the Kamakura period, Chikafusa's work begins with the age of the gods, which could be understood as the author's way to prove his shinkoku theory. At the same time, Varley argues that the discussion of the age of gods in Jinnô Shôtôki had another function and that would have been the advancement of several doctrinal points of the Ise sect of Shintô.<sup>956</sup> It is known that Chikafusa stayed at Ise at some point of time. Ise was part of the Kitabatake clan's areas of jurisdiction and thus the young Chikafusa's views and opinions were strongly influenced by the said school of thought. After having analyzed the origins of the Ise Shintô, Varley comes to the conclusion that,

“Nevertheless, Ise Shinto, whose ideas are a contrived mixture of borrowing from a variety of sources, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, yin-yang, and the five elements (wu-hsiang) system, had a major influence on the thinking of intellectuals of the late Kamakura and early Muromachi periods and even transmitted some of its ideas to Shinto sects of the later medieval age.”<sup>957</sup>

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<sup>954</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 166

<sup>955</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 9/10

<sup>956</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 12

<sup>957</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 13

He then argues that in his work Chikafusa adopted many of these views.

“Another aspect of Ise Shinto adopted by Chikafusa was the belief, based on the five elements system, that the five generations of heavenly kami between Kuni-no-Tokotachi and the generation of Izanagi and Izanami were created from the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, all of which were combined in the being of Kuni-no-Tokotachi. As can be observed in his account of the generations of these gods, Chikafusa also shared the greater interest believers in Ise Shinto had in the application of yin-yang (male-female) concepts than, let us say, the authors of *Nihon Shoki*. [...] But the most important influence of Ise Shinto on the writing of *Jinnô Shôtôki* is to be found in Chikafusa’s attribution of ethical qualities to the imperial regalia and, by association, to the sovereigns who successively possessed them.”<sup>958</sup>

The same opinions were expressed by Emperor Tenmu who tried to incorporate Taoist and yin-yang elements in both Shintô and Buddhism in order to adapt the two ideologies to one another and thus to strengthen his own position as a supreme ruler. The said example is useful for both the analysis of *Jinnô Shôtôki* and the purpose of the current work, as it was the conflict between the lines of the emperors Tenji and Tenmu which eventually brought Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku on the throne.

Nevertheless, according to Varley’s explanation, the view that *Jinnô Shôtôki* is a history of imperial succession is not completely right.

“*Jinnô Shôtôki* is often referred to as a study of imperial legitimacy in Japanese history. Yet Chikafusa was less concerned with the legitimacy of the imperial succession, which he accepted as an article of faith, than with the succession (*keitai*) itself: that is, the transmission of rulership from one sovereign to another over the generations.

We can observe, for example, how he sought to focus attention on the succession by presenting his material in *Jinnô Shôtôki* in the form of a strict progression of rule from the deities of creation to the generations of sovereigns in heaven and, finally, to the line of human emperors and empresses beginning with Jimmu. He tells us, moreover, that in order to devote himself fully to a narration of the succession, he decided to “omit discussion of those matters [in history] that are commonly known.”

Chikafusa’s concept of the Japanese imperial succession and its enduring character was founded on his basically Shinto view of history. There was to his mind, for example, no trend in history that moved inevitably or unalterably downward. Although there might be temporary reversals or declines, these would invariably be rectified with the passage of time. History was fundamentally constant, its aberrations correctable. Like that of all medieval Shintoists, Chikafusa’s thinking was strongly influenced by Buddhist and Confucian ideas; but at base his optimism stemmed from an unshakable faith in the eternal order of state and society in Japan as set forth by the founding gods. The stability of this order lay in its ordained social hierarchy. Chikafusa held that men were born with differing kami natures, that some were intended to be emperors, others to be ministers of state, and still others to be farmers. It was natural that there should be some mobility within the various classes, but it was contrary to the divine order that individuals should strive for ranks and positions to which they were not entitled by birth.”<sup>959</sup>

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<sup>958</sup> *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 14

<sup>959</sup> *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 15

The author argues that Chikafusa's usage of the word *shôtô* best reflects his understanding of the Imperial succession.<sup>960</sup> "*Shôtô*" is a political term which in most cases means "legitimate", but could also be interpreted as "rightful" (in both moral and legal sense). From that point of view, *shôtô* may be understood as "legitimate line". Chikafusa, however, interpreted "*shô*" as "direct" or "straight", and thus changed the meaning of the whole word to "direct line". He believed that in every unbroken line of succession such as that of the Imperial House, for example, there would always be deviations from the direct line, but those briefly changes would not harm the integrity of the line in general, as eventually the succession would be returned to the "*shôtô*". Chikafusa's doctrine could be most clearly understood upon analysis of the succession tendencies observed during the reigns of the first emperors of Japan.

"From Jimmu, purportedly the first human sovereign, until Keikô, the twelfth, the succession was passed directly from father to son, generation after generation. But when Keikô's son and chosen successor, the great warrior Yamato-take, died at any early age, Yamato-take's brother, Seimu, became the next emperor; and when Seimu chose Yamato-take's son, Chûai, to be his successor, "there arose the first deviation between direct descent by generations (*sei*) within the imperial family and the progression of imperial reigns (*dai*)". It therefore became necessary, Chikafusa claimed, to distinguish from Chûai on between "ordinary succession" and succession by direct generational descent.

The difficulty in distinguishing between succession to the throne and one that also constituted direct descent lay in the fact that direct descent could only be absolutely confirmed in retrospect, or after the passage of one or more generations.

[...] A son of Emperor Ôjin from the protohistoric period, Nintoku has traditionally been regarded as one of the most exemplary of Japanese sovereigns and is especially remembered in legend for having waived the annual tribute payable from the people after observing that no smoke was rising from their ovens. According to Chikafusa, Nintoku "brought tranquility to the country and gave succor to the people in a manner that was extraordinarily rare." Yet, even after the passage of nine reigns, the line of sovereigns lineally descended from Nintoku came to an end with the death of Emperor Buretsu, an evil sovereign who, according to the chronicles (*Nihon Shoki*), subjected the people to terror and cruel punishments. Chikafusa likened Nintoku to a Chinese-style "good first ruler" and Buretsu to a "bad last ruler" and declared that, despite Nintoku's exceptional virtue, his line had been shown by history not to be in the direct line of imperial descent. Instead, the direct line had been sustained by the descendants of another of Ôjin's sons, Prince Hayabusawake, whose great-great-grandson became Buretsu's successor as Emperor Keitai.

The selection of Keitai to inherit the emperorship was certainly unusual, inasmuch as Buretsu's death without direct lineal descendants seemed to mark a decisive break in the imperial succession. Attributing the Keitai succession to Amaterasu's divine purpose, Chikafusa rationalized it in these terms: "When there are direct successors to the imperial line, none among the collateral princes, no matter how wise he may be, can accede to the throne. Only when the imperial line appears about to die out will heaven allow someone, chosen for his wisdom, to become sovereign."<sup>961</sup>

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<sup>960</sup> *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 16

<sup>961</sup> *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 17/18

Chikafusa's theory could also be applied to later periods and other succession examples inside the Imperial House. In their attempt to ensure the continuation of the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line, its members even put woman on the throne (Kôken/Shôtoku), but her death in 770 marked the end of her line's hold on the throne and the return of Imperial authority to the (direct) Tenji line. As it is known, the emperors Tenji and Tenmu were brothers and Tenmu, the former Prince Ôama, could rise to the position of emperor only after he rebelled against his brother's supposed heir Prince Ôtomo. Following Chikafusa's theory, the Imperial succession deviated from the "direct line" in the instant when Prince Ôama ascended the throne and became Emperor Tenmu. That deviation continued until the reign of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. Chikafusa, however, sees the so-called Dôkyô Incident and the supposed affair between the monk and the female emperor as bad occurrences which contributed to the return of power to the hands of the direct line. In other words, the bad deeds of Emperor Shôtoku were eventually punished by the Heavens and thus she remained the last ruler of the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line. Her successor was Emperor Kônin, a descendant of the Tenji line, the so-called "direct line" of the Imperial House. According to Chikafusa's theory, these events could be considered another example of how the indirect line of the Imperial House was eventually brought down by bad rulers.

Interestingly enough, despite his ardent belief in the shinkoku theory, Kitabatake Chikafusa himself couldn't sustain it throughout his lifework. In many places in the long genealogy of the Imperial House, he stated that some events simply took place because such had been the will of the kami. Isolated cases like those of Emperor Buretsu or Emperor Shôtoku, both described as "bad rulers" replaced with "good sovereigns" from the direct line, were actually a rare phenomenon in the history of the Emperors of Japan. Therefore, Jinnô Shôtôki's author sought another means to prove his theory. According to his own views and beliefs, Chikafusa declared that, "*Unless a ruler possesses the virtues of all three of the regalia, he will find it difficult indeed to govern the country.*"<sup>962</sup> In that aspect, certain deviations could also be found in the so-called Tenmu (Kusakabe) line of the Imperial house. The legend of a certain black sword which belonged to Prince Kusakabe and later was given to Fujiwara no Fuhito to protect and hand over to the Kusakabe's successor as a means of legitimation was narrated in previous chapters. It is known that one of the Imperial regalia is also a sword. Therefore, it could be assumed that the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line adopted and self-created a replica of the official Imperial sword in order to legitimize their claim to the throne. However, due to unknown reasons, the last holder of Kusakabe's memento was Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's father Emperor Shômu. The last female ruler of the Nara period didn't receive the weapon, and thus could not be recognized as the rightful ruler of the state. Following Chikafusa's theory, that female ruler had not been virtuous enough to be given the sword, or, simply said, the sword didn't "choose" her as its rightful holder because it "knew" about her lack of virtue and the inability to sit on the throne stemming therefrom.

To further sustain his shinkoku theory, Chikafusa connected the direct line of succession in the Imperial house with the so-called "*ordering of Japanese society*".<sup>963</sup> As Chikafusa himself pointed out,

"In other countries we find countless examples of strife and disorder and the absence of laws governing the ordering of the classes; hence these countries are not fit to serve as models for us. In our country, on the other hand the mandate of Amaterasu is manifest and the positions of those high and low in society are fixed."<sup>964</sup>

In that aspect, Chikafusa's line of thought didn't differ much from that of some Confucian scholars who described the role which, in their case, the women should play in society. By denying to do so, she

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<sup>962</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 61

<sup>963</sup> See Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 25

<sup>964</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 164

proved herself to be lacking in both virtue and good nature. If one applies that theory to the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line, it becomes clear that the branch had been sinful since the moment of its creation, as Emperor Tenji's brother, Prince Ôama, was not satisfied with his position in society and wanted to change it. In that context, he wanted to change the order of things created and blessed by Amaterasu. Later on, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku made the same mistake as she assumed the throne even though she was a woman. That female emperor committed an even bigger sin, as she abdicated once only to ascend the throne for a second time.

Except his shinkoku theory, in Jinnô shôtoki Chikafusa also expressed his views on how a government should function: through ministers directly chosen and appointed by the emperor who then wouldn't need to directly attend to state matters.<sup>965</sup> Thus, in Kitabatake's opinion, the sovereign had to be simply a figurehead who should take care only of certain ceremonies without immersing himself in the state matters. From that point of view, Kôken/Shôtoku could also be regarded as a bad ruler since she wanted to rule directly and not through her ministers.

All things considered, it could be assumed that Kitabatake Chikafusa's goal was not to create an objective historical work, but to express his own views and opinions through examples from the genealogy of the Imperial house. As a result, Jinnô Shôtôki turned out to be a work full of contradictions. On the one hand, the author considered the Imperial line with all its emperors as one of the virtues of the state, while on the other hand, he argued that not all rulers were as virtuous as they should have been and described them as sovereigns who belonged to a line which deviated from the direct line of succession. The said direct line was the one which always took over when the atrocities of the "bad rulers" became too serious and could not be blessed by the deities anymore. Therefore, it turns out that all "good rulers" belonged to the direct line, while all "bad rulers" were part of a line which deviated from the "straight" one. From that point of view, it could be assumed that considering that she had been an emperor from a branch of the Imperial House, Kôken/Shôtoku would not be positively described by Chikafusa. According to the author's views on certain matters, she could even be considered a triple sinner: firstly, she did not belong to the "direct line"; secondly, she ascended the throne despite being a woman, and thus tried to deny the "*ordering of Japanese society*"; and thirdly, she wanted to rule directly and refused to rely on her ministers.

#### Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's chronicle

The expectations to find a rather negative portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in Kitabatake Chikafusa's lifework seem to be confirmed upon seeing her chronicle. Similar to previous historical sources such as Shoku Nihongi or Fusô ryakuki, Jinnô shôtoki also presents the reader with two completely different descriptions of the last emperor of Nara Japan divided into her reign as Emperor Kôken and her rule as Emperor Shôtoku. As it could be seen in the original text<sup>966</sup>, Emperor Kôken's chronicle is rather short and in it, one finds only brief information about her parents ("*Daughter of Emperor Shômu; Mother: Empress Kômyô, daughter of the great minister Fubito*"<sup>967</sup>), about the circumstances around her ascension to the throne ("*After the untimely death of his son, Prince Asaka, Shômu had no other male heirs and therefore selected this princess to succeed to the throne.*"<sup>968</sup>), and then the events connected with her abdication ("*Then, having adopted Ôi-no-ô and made him crown prince, she abdicated in his favor and became daijô-tennô. Empress Kôken entered holy orders and lived in the Nishi-no-Miya of the Heizei Palace.*"<sup>969</sup>). Thus, only a couple of sentences cover Emperor Kôken's

<sup>965</sup> See Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 22

<sup>966</sup> See 神皇正統記 [Jinnô shôtôki]: ○第四十六代、孝謙天皇 [The 46<sup>th</sup> Emperor Kôken-tennô]

<sup>967</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 143

<sup>968</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 143

<sup>969</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 143

reign which had in fact lasted nine years (749 – 758). Her chronicle is kept as short as possible and no important events are noted (for example, the eye-opening ceremony of the Daibutsu at Tôdaiji which took place in 752, or the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro from 757), thus creating the impression that she had been an insignificant ruler during whose reign nothing eventful had occurred.

In contrast, the chronicle of Emperor Shôtoku is very detailed and its portrayal of the last emperor of Nara Japan could be considered rather peculiar.

“○第四十八代、称徳天皇は孝謙の重祚なり。庚戌年正月一日更に即位、同七日改元。太上天皇竊に藤原の武智麻呂の大臣の第二の子、押勝を幸し給ひき。大師く その時太政大臣をあらためて大師といふく 正一位になる。見給へば笑ましき事とて、藤原に二字を添へて恵美の姓を賜ひき。天下の政、しかしながら、委任せられにけり。後に道鏡と云法師く 弓削の氏人也く 又寵幸ありしに、押勝怒をなし、廢帝を勧め申して、上皇の宮を傾けんとせしに、こと露れて誅に伏しぬ。帝も淡路に遷されたまふ。かくて上皇重祚あり。先に出家せさせ給へりしかば、尼ながら位に居給ひけるにこそ。非常の極なりけんかし。[…] この道鏡始は大臣に准じてく 日本准大臣のはじめにやく 大臣禪師と云ひしを、太政大臣になし給ふ。それによりて、次々く、納言、参議にも、法師を混へなされにき。道鏡世を心の儘にしければ、争ふ人のなかりしにや。大臣吉備真備の公、右中弁藤原の百川などありき。されど力およぼざりけるにこそ。天下を治給こと五年、五十七歳おましくき。天武、聖武、国に大功あり、仏法を弘め給ひしに、皇胤ましまさず、此女帝にて絶え給ひぬ。女帝崩れ給しかば、道鏡をば下野の講師になして、流し下されにき。抑この道鏡は、法王の位を授けられたりしを猶飽かずして、皇位に即かんと云ふ志ありけり。女帝さすが思ひ煩ひ給ひけるにや、和氣清麿呂といふ人を勅使にさして、宇佐の八幡宮に申されける。大菩薩様々託宣ありて、更に許されず。清麿呂歸参して有のまゝに奏聞す。道鏡怒をなして、清麿呂が臑筋を断ちて、土左の国に流し遣はす。清麿呂愁へ悲しみて、大菩薩を怨みかこち申しければ、小蛇出で来て、その疵を癒してけり。光仁位に即き給ひしかば、即ち召し遷さる。神威を尊び申て、河内国に寺を立てて神願寺と云ひしを、後に高雄の山に遷し立つ。今の神護寺これなり。件の頃までは神威もかく著き事なりき。かくて、道鏡終に望を逐げず。女帝も又程なく崩れ給ふ。宗廟社稷を安

くする事は八幡の冥慮<sup>めいりよ</sup>たりし上に、皇統を定め奉る事は藤原百川<sup>ふじはらのももかは</sup>の朝臣の功なりとぞ。<sup>970</sup>

[Empress Shôtoku

Forty-eighth reign

Reaccession of Empress Kôken

*This sovereign became empress for the second time on New Year's day of 765 and changed the era name on the seventh day of the same month. Even before she reascended the throne, Shôtoku had become secretly infatuated with Oshikatsu (second son of the great minister Fujiwara no Muchimaro) and made him grand preceptor (taishi). (The title daijô-daijin was changed to taishi at this time.) She also bestowed upon Oshikatsu the senior first rank.*

*Because he seemed always to be smiling, Oshikatsu was given two traditional characters for his surname, making it Fujiwara-Emi, or "the Fujiwara who smiles." In addition, the administration of court government was placed entirely in his charge.*

*Later, when the priest Dôkyô of the Yuge clan received the retired empress's favor, Oshikatsu became infuriated. Enlisting the support of the emperor, he plotted to attack the empress's palace. But the plot was revealed beforehand, Oshikatsu was killed, and the emperor was exiled to Awaji. Thereupon the retired empress reascended the throne. Because she had previously entered holy orders, she was obliged this time to assume the imperial office as a nun. This was indeed the most unusual of developments. [...]*

*The title given to this priest, Dôkyô, was great minister and master of Buddhist meditation, which corresponded to the usual great minister designation. (This was apparently the first instance of a jun-daijin in Japanese history.) But before long Dôkyô was advanced to the office of great minister of the council of state with the additional designation of master of Buddhist meditation (zenji), and other priests were promoted one after another to such positions as counselor and imperial adviser. Since Dôkyô had his way in all things, there seems to have been no one to oppose these advancements. The ministers of the court at the time included Great Minister Kibi no Makibi, Middle Controller of the Left Fujiwara no Momokawa, and others, but they were powerless. [...]*

*Empress Shôtoku reigned for five years and died at the age of fifty-seven.*

*Emperors Temmu and Shômu did many outstanding things for the country and were instrumental in spreading the Buddhist Law. But their line failed to endure and came to an end with this empress.*

*After Empress Shôtoku died, Dôkyô was relegated to the position of priest in charge (kôji) of the kokubunji in Shimotsuke Province. This Dôkyô had been elevated to the rank of king of the Buddhist Law, but was not satisfied and aspired to the imperial office itself. The empress was evidently much perplexed, and commissioned Wake no Kiyomaro to go and inquire about the matter at the Hachiman Shrine in Usa. In response to Kiyomaro's inquiry, Hachiman gave forth various oracles forbidding Dôkyô's accession to the throne. When Kiyomaro returned to the*

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<sup>970</sup> 神皇正統記 [Jinnô shôtôki]: ○第四十八代、称徳天皇 [The 48<sup>th</sup> Emperor Shôtoku-tennô]

capital and reported this, Dôkyô became infuriated. He had the tendons in Kiyomaro's knees cut and exiled him to Tosa Province.

Kiyomaro was sorely grieved and complained bitterly to Hachiman; whereupon a small snake appeared before him and repaired his deformity. And when Kônin succeeded to the throne, Kiyomaro was recalled to the capital. Wishing to express his great reverence for the power of the gods (*shin'i*), Kiyomaro built a temple in Kawachi Province called Jinganji. This temple was later moved to Mount Takao and became the present-day Jingoji.

Thus was the power of the gods manifested up to this point in history. In the end Dôkyô failed to achieve his aims, and the empress herself soon died. Through the divine working of Hachiman the country was rendered tranquil, and as a result of the distinguished statesmanship of Fujiwara no Momokawa the imperial succession was properly decided.<sup>971</sup>

According to the second chronicle of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, she had become “infatuated” (幸し給ひき) first with Emi no Oshikatsu (Fujiwara no Nakamaro) and only then with Dôkyô. After such a description, one gets the impression that Emperor Shôtoku had been a capricious woman who easily gave away her affections to different men who, having been cleverer than her, exploited that weakness of hers in order to rise to political power. To be precise, however, the verb which is translated as “infatuated” could be literally interpreted as “to bless”, which gives a totally different meaning to the chronicle. Anyway, the meaning of the character 幸 and its reading were already discussed in previous chapters and, as it could be seen, there is no commonly accepted translation used by all Western authors. Rather, the interpretation of the character is left to the individual decision of the respective translator. In his *Wake-no-Kiyomaro-den's* translation, for example, Hermann Bohner uses the meaning “favor”. Here, H. Paul Varley interpretes it as “infatuated”. In *Shoku Nihongi's* translations, for example, all words containing the character 幸 are translated as “favor”. The word “favor” means “approval or support for someone or something”<sup>972</sup> which is something different from “love” or “affection”. All things considered, it could be concluded that the translation “infatuated” was deliberately chosen by Varley. Of course, it could only be speculated why he decided to present the reader with such portrayal of the last emperor of Nara Japan.

Setting aside the paradox of the character 幸 and its different interpretations, the *Jinnô shôtoki* chronicle continues with commentary on Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion and Retired Emperor Kôken's reascension to the throne. Similar to the *Shoku Nihongi* chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) which narrates the rebellion, *Jinnô shôtoki* also explains that the reason for Emi no Oshikatsu's actions had been his dissatisfaction with the fact that Dôkyô was able to win the emperor's “favor” (chôkô, 寵幸). After Nakamaro's defeat and execution, and Emperor Junnin's exile to Awaji, the chronicle narrates that Kôken reascended the throne despite having been a Buddhist nun: an event which had been “the most unusual of developments”. As a matter of fact, the character 極 used in the original text can also be translated as “extremity”, which gives slightly negative connotation to the sentence.

The chronicle continues with Dôkyô's rise to power and, interestingly enough, one reads the sentence “Since Dôkyô had his way in all things, there seems to have been no one to oppose these advancements.” That portrayal of the political situation in the country after the monk's elevation to the position of First

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<sup>971</sup> *Jinnô shôtôki*, transl. by Varley 1980: 144/147

<sup>972</sup> Cambridge Dictionary: Favor



Minister of the Great Council of State and Meditation Monk definitely raises negative sentiments toward Dôkyô. On the other hand, a criticism of the emperor could also be felt since as a ruler, she had been the one who allowed the monk to have *“his way in all things”*.

Then, the chronicle offers a short narrative of the Dôkyô Incident and the death of Emperor Shôtoku. That last part is a perfect example of Chikafusa’s theory about the “direct line” and the fate of the branches of the Imperial family which deviated from it. For example, one reads that *“Emperors Temmu and Shômu did many outstanding things for the country and were instrumental in spreading the Buddhist Law. But their line failed to endure and came to an end with this empress.”* Moreover, the chronicle ends with the conclusion *“Thus was the power of the gods manifested up to this point in history. In the end Dôkyô failed to achieve his aims, and the empress herself soon died. Through the divine working of Hachiman the country was rendered tranquil, and as a result of the distinguished statesmanship of Fujiwara no Momokawa the imperial succession was properly decided.”* That explanation of the Dôkyô Incident and the end of the Temmu line only supports Kitabatake Chikafusa’s initial theory that there is one “direct line” in the Imperial House and all deviations from it are eventually brought down by “bad rulers”. In the said case, it was thanks to Hachiman’s *“divine working”* and Fujiwara no Momokawa’s *“distinguished statesmanship”* that the direct line was restored. As a matter of fact, the Fujiwara no Momokawa mentioned here as a renowned statesman was the Minister of the Right who helped the exiled Wake no Kiyomaro on the latter’s way to Ôsumi. It was believed that Momokawa played a key role in the appointment of Prince Shirakabe as Emperor Shôtoku’s successor. As Kitabatake Chikafusa explains, the minister was supposedly the instrument chosen by the deities through which they restored the direct line’s hold on the throne. Interestingly enough, according to the narrative, not only Dôkyô’s failure to usurp the throne but also Emperor Shôtoku’s death are attributed to the *“power of the gods manifested up to this point in history.”* Thus, the impression is created that the deities waited long enough for the branch’s hold on the throne to come to an end, but since that had not been the case, they decided to step up directly by first setting up the Dôkyô Incident in which the monk and his political career were brought to ruin, and eventually bringing death to the female emperor who sat on the throne. Only then did they use Fujiwara no Momokawa as a tool to restore the direct line’s hold on the throne by choosing Prince Shirakabe as a successor.

All in all, Jinnô shôtoki’s portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku while not directly negative, is neither positive nor neutral. The fact that the chronicle of Emperor Kôken consists only of several sentences which say nothing important about a reign which continued nine years could be interpreted as criticism of a woman who didn’t know her position in society and wanted to rise above her destined place in the world. After all, Chikafusa himself expressed the opinion that in Japan *“the positions of those high and low in society are fixed”* and regarded the cases in which rulers from branches of the Imperial House ascended the throne as the wrong actions of immoral people who refused to acknowledge their rightful role in society. While the chronicle of Emperor Shôtoku is much longer, it is definitely more critically opinionated toward the last female ruler of Nara Japan. To be objective, Chikafusa did not say directly whether Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku had been a good or a bad ruler, but there are certain connotations of her having been a “bad ruler” scattered throughout the chronicle. Firstly, she is described as a capricious woman who easily gave away her support to various courtiers. Then, her reascension to the throne is described with a rather ambiguous word which could be understood both positively and negatively. Then, Dôkyô’s rise to power and his freedom to do as he wished are indirectly presented as her failure as a ruler. The culmination of the criticism of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, however, is the last part of her chronicle which narrates the Dôkyô Incident and Shôtoku’s death. In it, even her passing away is described as the deities’ direct interference in order to restore the direct line’s hold on the throne. As it was already discussed, Chikafusa argued that everytime a ruler from a branch different from the direct line sat on the throne, the said deviation came to an end at the hands

of a “bad ruler” (for example, the Nintoku line which ended with the reign of Buretsu who had been an “evil sovereign”). Similar to the narrative in the last paragraph of Emperor Shôtoku’s chronicle where the emperors Tenmu and Shômu are described as rulers who “*did many outstanding things for the country and were instrumental in spreading the Buddhist Law.*”, Emperor Nintoku was also portrayed as an emperor who “*brought tranquility to the country and gave succor to the people in a manner that was extraordinarily rare.*” And as Varley summarizes it,

*“...the line of sovereigns lineally descended from Nintoku came to an end with the death of Emperor Buretsu, an evil sovereign who, according to the chronicles (Nihon Shoki), subjected the people to terror and cruel punishments. Chikafusa likened Nintoku to a Chinese-style “good first ruler” and Buretsu to a “bad last ruler” and declared that, despite Nintoku’s exceptional virtue, his line had been shown by history not to be in the direct line of imperial descent.”<sup>973</sup>*

In regard to the end of the Tenmu line, Chikafusa says that “*But their line failed to endure and came to an end with this empress.*”, thus indirectly pointing out the fact that “*his line had been shown by history not to be in the direct line of imperial descent*”. If one compares the descriptions of the two lines’ respective beginning and end, it seems like their fate had been almost identical. Therefore, it could be assumed that as the Nintoku line came to an end with a “bad ruler” such as Buretsu, so had been the case with the Tenmu line which ended with the reign of Emperor Shôtoku. While Chikafusa did not directly express an opinion on whether the last female ruler of Nara Japan had been a good or a bad ruler, the sole fact that her line, which deviated from the “direct” order of succession, came to an end with her death would be enough for one to conclude that she had been a “bad ruler”. In that aspect, Kitabatake Chikafusa’s work differs from sources from previous epochs which portrayed Kôken/Shôtoku either positively or at least neutrally. At the same time, however, it could not be said that Chikafusa had anything against Kôken/Shôtoku on a personal level. It is rather that his negative portrayal of the last emperor of Nara Japan is strongly influenced by his own views on matters such as Imperial succession and legitimacy, social order or governmental system. She simply happened to be a collective image of all that which Chikafusa criticized and considered wrong in society.

## Edo Period

### Political turbulences and the rise of the Tokugawa

The end of the Muromachi period marked by the abolition of the Ashikaga shôgunate did not mean that authority returned to the hands of the emperor. On the contrary, it paved the way for the daimyô to grab power and to hold onto it. The so-called Sengoku period from 1467 to 1615 during which various warlords fought one another over supremacy eventually created the opportunity for the most powerful among them to establish their own government and to effectively rule the country. The first person to try to attain ultimate power was Oda Nobunaga. He almost succeeded in unifying the country under his banner, but his dream was crushed after he was killed by one of his generals named Akechi Mitsuhide.<sup>974</sup> However, Nobunaga’s death didn’t mean the end of his aspirations. On the contrary, his dream was continued by one of his most trusted generals and his right-hand man Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi was able to not only exact revenge on Nobunaga’s murderer Mitsuhide but also to continue the unification of the country under the rule of the samurai.<sup>975</sup> Having finally achieved his (and Nobunaga’s) goal in 1590, he began to proclaim laws with which he targeted the independence of all weaponholders in the country who did not belong to the warrior class. With his “Sword Hunt” law from 1588, for example, he ordered the confiscation of all weapons held by peasants, and thus practically

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<sup>973</sup> Jinnô shôtôki, transl. by Varley 1980: 17/18

<sup>974</sup> Nakabayashi 2009: 6

<sup>975</sup> Nakabayashi 2009: 6

bound them to the land without giving them any chance to climb the social ladder due to their skills with the sword.<sup>976</sup> Unfortunately for him, Hideyoshi was never able to assume the title of shôgun due to his humble background. He was instead adopted by a noble from the Fujiwara clan, which allowed him to attain the titles of kanpaku (Imperial regent) in 1585 and then dajô-daijin in 1586.<sup>977</sup> Despite Hideyoshi's political position and his success in practically unifying the country under his rule, the stability of both the land and the Toyotomi clan was threatened by the lack of successor. His (so far) only son Tsurumatsu died in 1591 and Hideyoshi eventually was forced to adopt his nephew Hidetsugu in 1592.<sup>978</sup> After that, he decided to step down from the position of kampaku in favor of his adopted son and took the title of taikô (retired kanpaku). Despite practically still being the leading political figure in the country, Hideyoshi could not accept the fact that his descent didn't allow him to rule as an emperor. He considered the Chinese principle of a "Heaven's mandate"<sup>979</sup> much fairer. Therefore, the taikô turned his eyes to the continent. He planned to attack and conquer Korea and use it as a springboard for his campaign against China. Eventually, after two unsuccessful military operations in Korea<sup>980</sup> and the birth of a baby boy named Hideyori in 1594<sup>981</sup>, Hideyoshi died in 1598 and left his four-year-old successor under the protection of a Council of Five Elders which consisted of the most powerful daimyô in the country. Their function, however, was not only to support Hideyori until his coming of age but also to keep each other in check so that no one of them could gain enough power to rebel against the Toyotomi clan.<sup>982</sup>

A leading role in that Council was played by Tokugawa Ieyasu, the man who several years later was able to unify Japan under the rule of his family for almost 300 years which remained in history as the Edo period. In contrast to Hideyoshi, Ieyasu possessed all things required to become shôgun. Born in 1543 as the son of the daimyô of Mikawa, he spent his youth as a hostage first to the Oda clan, then to the neighboring daimyô of Imagawa. After his coming of age, Ieyasu was regarded by Oda Nobunaga as a valuable ally due to the strategical positions of their respective provinces.<sup>983</sup> After the unfortunate, and untimely, death of Nobunaga, Ieyasu became a vassal to the latter's right-hand man and obvious successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Due to his military prowess and strategical thinking which had already won him the fame of a general who had never lost a battle, Ieyasu was considered a valuable asset to Hideyoshi. Thus, for the future taikô, it became crucial to ensure the support of the daimyô of Mikawa if he wanted to unify the country. The most notable military campaign of the two men was that against the Hôjô and their stronghold Odawara from 1590. Being able to trace their lineage back to the Taira clan, Hôjô did not want to bow before a peasant general. Therefore, they had to be eliminated. The siege of Odawara continued for only three months after which the whole family was eradicated and Hideyoshi rewarded Ieyasu with the now-lordless Hôjô estates. Tokugawa, "...*was now in command of the largest consolidated plain, the Kanto, with amassed revenue of 2.5 million koku.*"<sup>984</sup> However, while the kampaku had seemingly rewarded Ieyasu, his recognition could be regarded rather as a strategic

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<sup>976</sup> See Berry 1989: 102/103

<sup>977</sup> See Vaporis 2019: 342

<sup>978</sup> See Vaporis 2019: 344

<sup>979</sup> „In der chinesischen Theorie gebührt das >>Mandat des Himmels<< (*tien ming*) prinzipiell dem moralisch Würdigen, nicht aber dem durch Geburt Berufenen. Nur ein wahrhaft tugendhafter Herrscher konnte nach konfuzianischer Grundüberzeugung das Wohlergehen des Staates sichern, da Herrscher und Staat in mystischer Hinsicht eng miteinander verbunden waren. Verlor der Herrscher aber seine Tugend (*te*), so hatte er auch den legitimen Anspruch auf Herrschaft verwirkt und konnte bzw. mußte einem anderen, oder gar einer anderen Dynastie, weichen.“, Kojiki, transl. by Antoni 2012: 317

<sup>980</sup> See Vaporis 2019: 344/345

<sup>981</sup> See Vaporis 2019: 344

<sup>982</sup> See Hall (b) 1991: 142

<sup>983</sup> See Hall (b) 1991: 130/135

<sup>984</sup> Jansen 2002: 29

exchange in the former's favor – in order to be given Kantô, Tokugawa had to give up his home domain Mikawa. While he had a base and supporters in his old estate in central Japan, his new territory in eastern Japan was completely foreign. He had to forge relationships with his new vassals and to win the trust of his subjects. From that point of view, it could be assumed that Hideyoshi's "reward" was actually a smart plan to keep Ieyasu busy<sup>985</sup>, so that the latter did not have the time and resources to turn against him in the near future. Fortunately for Ieyasu, however, his accommodation to his new home turned out to have been

„... the perfect preparation for his exercise of national power after the battle of Sekigahara. He placed his most trustworthy vassals in locations of strategic importance. He set up a machinery of local administration and taxation. As his headquarters he selected a small fortress town in the middle of his new realm instead of rebuilding Odawara, from which the Hojo daimyo had dominated the area. The place he chose became Edo, modern Tokyo.“<sup>986</sup>

Eight years after their joint campaign against the Hôjô, Hideyoshi died and left the Council of Five as guardians of his four-year-old son Hideyori. While the initial purpose of the Council was not only to support Hideyoshi's heir but also to ensure that the members would keep each other in check by not allowing one to rise above the others, it turned out that the other daimyô were simply not powerful enough to compete against and thus to contain Ieyasu and his ambitions. He began to forge alliances with important warrior families through political marriages, and thus turned the members of the Council against him. The death of Maeda Toshiie, a fellow elder, in 1599 gave Ieyasu a free hand to march to Fushimi and to settle in Ôsaka Castle, the residence of Hideyori. His action angered the remaining three elders and soon the country was divided into two factions: that of Ieyasu and the people around Ishida Mitsunari. All was decided in 1600 in the battle of Sekigahara when the allied forces of Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated the Western army of Ishida and secured Ieyasu's position as winner and potential ruler of the country.<sup>987</sup> Before that, however, there were still things to be taken care of.

„Even so, the successful conclusion left him with much to do. Hideyori remained alive and well in Osaka as reminder of Ieyasu's pledge of loyalty, and many of the most important Hideyoshi daimyo were still in their realms. Hideyori was only eight years old, but his rank and office at court put him on a level with Ieyasu.“<sup>988</sup>

Hideyori's only political disadvantage was the fact that he could never attain the title of shôgun due to his descent. Ieyasu exploited namely that weakness of his young rival. In Keichô 2 (1603), he received the title of shôgun from Emperor Go-Yôzei and several months later established his military government in Edo, which officially set the beginning of the Edo period in Japanese history. Although Ieyasu retreated from politics in 1605 in favor of his son Hidetada and took the title of ôgosho (retired shôgun), he still remained the factual ruler of the country.<sup>989</sup> His position as a retired shôgun, however, gave him more freedom to work toward solidifying the Tokugawa hold on power. In 1615, he promulgated the Buke shohatto (武家諸法度, Laws Governing the Military Households) which regulated the responsibilities, duties and the conduct of the warrior class.<sup>990</sup> In the same year, the Kuge shohatto (公家諸法度, Laws for the Imperial and Court Officials) were issued with which he managed

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<sup>985</sup> See Hall (b) 1991: 136/137

<sup>986</sup> Jansen 2002: 29

<sup>987</sup> See Hall (b) 1991: 143/144

<sup>988</sup> Jansen 2002: 29

<sup>989</sup> See Hall (b) 1991: 145

<sup>990</sup> See de Bary 2010: 12/14

the relationship between the bakufu, the emperor and the court. The law specified that the sovereign should devote himself to scholarship and poetry.<sup>991</sup> The last step toward the consolidation of the Tokugawa rule was made in the same 1615 when Ieyasu seized Ôsaka Castle and eliminated Hideyori and the remaining members of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's family.<sup>992</sup> After the death of Hideyoshi's successor, there was nobody remaining who could potentially gather enough support to stand against the Tokugawa bakufu. Thus, the family's hold on power was secured.

### Cultural innovations

Having been the longest period of peace in Japanese history, the Edo period created favourable conditions for cultural, religious and educational development. Despite, or probably thanks to, the Sakoku edict from 1635<sup>993</sup> which could be considered "*an effort on the part of the Tokugawa to choose, on their own terms, with whom to trade, based on Tokugawa strategic political and economic goals*"<sup>994</sup>, Japan had more than enough time to turn inwards and to find its own strengths and values. The first shôgun Ieyasu became the patron of Confucian academies in which the samurai not only educated themselves in writing (kanji), Confucian classics, calligraphy, arithmetics and etiquette but also learned military arts and skills.<sup>995</sup> The merchants and artisans, on the other hand, supported the so-called terakoya (寺子屋, temple schools) in which basic literacy and arithmetic were taught.<sup>996</sup> Thus, in short time, a big part of the Japanese population, both male and female, was literate, a fact which massively encouraged the development of literature.

As it was previously mentioned, Confucianism with its strict principles and norms of conduct attracted the warrior class since the latter's entry into the political life of the country. That tendency continued and even reached its peak during the Edo period. The Neo-Confucian teachings were leading in the transformation of the society from one ruled by the people into one governed by the law. In that aspect, Buddhism and Shintô had to adjust themselves, or let themselves be adjusted, to the new philosophy. Speaking of Buddhism, it would be wrong to conclude that it had completely lost its hold on the society's views. Instead, as Judit Árokay explains, "*...überschnitten sich diskriminierende Tendenzen der beiden [Buddhism and Confucianism] und verstärkten sich gegenseitig.*"<sup>997</sup> One such tendency, for example, was the concept of karma which became a main pillar of support for the Edo-period religious and societal life.

"Die Verbreitung des Glaubens an das Karma, der so unglückliche Daseinsformen wie die von Frauen oder Behinderten als Ergebnis früherer Sünden erklärt, hat die Diskriminierung von Frauen, Behinderten und den Unberührbaren (eta und hinin) weiter bestätigt. So wurden konfuzianische Ideen durch buddhistische Riten und das Wirken buddhistischer Mönche in der gesamten Bevölkerung verbreitet und gefestigt: die unbedingte Unterordnung der Frau, die Notwendigkeit von streng getrennten sozialen Klassen oder die Wichtigkeit der Ahnenverehrung, die sich nur auf die männliche Ahnenlinie bezog."<sup>998</sup>

On the other hand, the result of the interaction between Shintô and Neo-Confucianism turned out to have been the kokugaku ideology according to which Japan, as the "Land of the Gods", had to be "freed"

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<sup>991</sup> See de Bary 2010: 14/18

<sup>992</sup> See Jansen 2002: 36

<sup>993</sup> See Laver 2011: 16/17

<sup>994</sup> Laver 2011: 2

<sup>995</sup> See Dore 1992: 59

<sup>996</sup> See Perez 2009: 234

<sup>997</sup> Árokay 2003: 190

<sup>998</sup> Árokay 2003: 190/191

of all things foreign (Chinese, above all). Only if the island country turned its look inwards, toward its own culture, without the influence of foreign philosophies and cultures, would it be able to reach its true potential. Later on, it was namely that ideology which strongly influenced the emperor-centered nationalism of modern Japan.<sup>999</sup>

Traditional Japanese arts also flourished during the Edo period. Japanese painting, for example, developed into an art form characterized by decorative and showy patterns and a playful spirit. It became known as the Rinpa school.<sup>1000</sup> During the Edo period, the ukiyo (the floating world) became a term for the description of the common people's striving for entertainment, fashion and aesthetic in everyday life. Geisha (professional female entertainers), Kabuki theater, bunraku (puppet theater) and woodblock prints also known as ukiyo-e flourished. Traditionally, the main theme of the ukiyo-e was the pleasure districts and the "entertainment" received there. That meant that in most cases, the depicted figures were female beauties or kabuki actors. Later on, landscapes also became a matter of interest to the artists.<sup>1001</sup> Interestingly enough, despite the strict Neo-Confucian censorship, a certain art form containing sexual content was able to flourish during the Edo period. Its name was shunga.<sup>1002</sup> Here, it should be noted that the pornography, or for that matter sexual intercourse, was not as strictly judged in the Japanese society and religion as it was the case in the Western and Christian societies. The interest in genitals, the male ones in particular, could be traced back to the earliest periods of Japanese history. Earlier in this work, it was already mentioned that phallic stones were often erected during the Jōmon period as a way to honor the human reproduction and the male role in it. During the Heian period, that interest only became stronger after the import of medicinal texts from China. According to Yano Akiko,

"Medical and physiological interests must have been firmly established among courtiers by 984, when the influential compilation of Chinese medical texts, *Ishinpo* 医心方, was completed and presented to the emperor. Chapter 27 of volume 28 of *Ishinpo*, subtitled *Bonai* 房内, teaches how to prepare medications for the enlargement of the male member. Nevertheless, the extent of enlargement possible is limited to a modest one sun 寸 (approx. 3 cm), and there is no mention of any more extraordinary degree of enlargement or that having a larger penis enhances sexual performance. Moreover, the main concern of the volume appears not to be the size of the penis, but rather the practice of various sexual activities necessary for the maintenance of health and longevity."<sup>1003</sup>

From that point of view, one could better understand the depictions of male genitals in *setsuwa* stories such as those found in *Nihon ryōiki* and *Kojidan*. While the import of such medicinal texts occurred at a later period of time, *Nihon ryōiki*'s author *Kyōkai*, who confessed to having used Chinese sources as reference, surely had come upon texts in which male genitals were a topic of discussion while compiling his work. In the case of *Kojidan*, at the time of its compilation, the Chinese texts had already reached Japanese soil and it wouldn't have been difficult for *Minamoto no Akikane* to adopt the theme in his own work. To be precise, however, the imported medicinal texts did not concentrate on the size of the penis itself, but rather on how sexual activities could be utilized in order to make one healthier and to prolong one's life. From that point of view, the size of the male genitals and the ability of the man to satisfy his sexual partner began to be directly associated with the person's health. In short, the

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<sup>999</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2018: The Kokugaku (Native Japan Studies) School

<sup>1000</sup> See Kleiner 2009: 112

<sup>1001</sup> See Kleiner 2009: 113/114

<sup>1002</sup> See Munro 2008: 9/13

<sup>1003</sup> Yano 2013: 68

bigger a man's penis was, the healthier one would be. True to their satirical nature, however, both *Nihon ryôiki* and *Kojidan* used the portrayal of male genitals as a metaphor, as a way to express deeper thoughts through the presentation of intimate details. In any case, despite the political turbulences during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the phallic theme and the interest in sexual matters did not diminish, rather they became stronger. In the Edo period, collections on erotic theme were almost as popular as any other literature. As Yano Akiko explains,

“The practice of copying masterpiece classical handscrolls extended to paintings with erotic themes. Several copies survive of *Koshibagaki zoshi* 小柴垣草紙 and *Fukuro hoshi ekotoba* 袋法師絵詞, both rare examples of handscrolls featuring explicit sexual depictions that originated in the medieval period (although both originals are thought to have been lost). Copies of these two works were said to have been presented to the Tokugawa 徳川 shogunate at the end of the Edo period. The fact that erotic-themed handscrolls were copied in a lavish manner and presented to high officials evidently suggests a different attitude in premodern society towards erotica.

Another example of an erotic-themed handscroll from the medieval period is *Chigo no soshi* 稚児草紙, which illustrates male-male sexual relationships between *chigo* 稚児 (adolescent males who studied and worked as apprentices in Buddhist temples) and older priests. The original work is said to be dated to 1321 and preserved in *Sanboin* 三宝院, *Daigoji* 醍醐寺 temple. Although its popularization in early modern times is not as apparent as the other two titles mentioned above, at least one late Edo period copy is known. [...]

During the Edo period, the copying of old *shunga* handscrolls originally from the medieval period continued in parallel with the creation of popular *shunga* prints and books. The former was carried out mostly for antiquarian interest, but the artists participating in the latter often found inspiration from classical works and utilized them in their new compositions. The phallic contest continued to be a stimulus for artists.”<sup>1004</sup>

The phallic contest mentioned by Yano Akiko was a competition between men with surrealistically big genitals which was often depicted in handscrolls and books. The initial purpose of the portrayal of such contests was entertainment, but later on the artists began to use the subject only as a background to more serious matters.

### The sexual theme and the handscrolls, and Emperor Shôtoku's depiction in them

An example of a handscroll which used the sexual theme as a background to the depiction of a composition with a deeper meaning is the “*Dôkyô chôhō no zu*” [道鏡寵奉之図, “Depiction of [how] *Dôkyô* [won the emperor's] favor”] which could be found in the Art Research Center of the Ritsumeikan University in Kyôto. Dated to 1821, it depicts a phallic contest organized with the sole purpose of finding the man with the largest penis in the country who could serve Emperor Shôtoku. The story concludes with *Dôkyô* being successfully chosen by the emperor and the latter's appointment as *dajō-daijin* thanks to his sexual prowess.<sup>1005</sup> As Yano Akiko comments,

“This sounds like a rather naive happy ending, considering the notorious reputation of their relationship in medieval Buddhist discourses on the evils of mixing sex and politics as well as

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<sup>1004</sup> See Yano 2013: 70/71

<sup>1005</sup> See pp. 334

of Shotoku's being unmarried and not bearing a legitimate heir. Due to their infamous reputation, Shotoku and Dokyo were natural subjects for shunga. Dokyo especially, for his legendary penis, regularly appears in popular erotic books in the Edo period. Both Shotoku and Dokyo were even deified in premodern popular beliefs."<sup>1006</sup>

As it could be seen, the assumed love (or for that matter sexual) relationship between the emperor and the monk has become a matter of interest in a somewhat different aspect from that which was accentuated in works from earlier epochs. In comparison with *Nihon ryōiki* or *Kojidan* which depicted the idea of a love relationship between Emperor Shōtoku and Dōkyō as something sinful, and openly criticized or ridiculed it, the Edo-period art adopted a more liberal approach to the matter and described the theme in a much more entertaining way.

Other scrolls from that period developed the topic further. In them, the women were portrayed as beings with much more sexual stamina than the men. An example of that trend would be the handscroll series "Kōken-tei no monko Yuge no Dōkyō kensei no zu" [孝謙帝の門子弓削の道鏡憲政の図], "Depiction of the rule of Yuge no Dōkyō, the monk [supported by] Emperor Kōken" painted in 1865 by Utagawa Hiroshige III. The first scroll from the series shows a phallic contest among priests, commoners and courtiers, with court ladies watching them from a distance.<sup>1007</sup> As soon as the competition comes to an end, a group of men and women starts an orgy. Here, it should be noted that the various positions and acrobatic poses depicted in the second scroll resemble more a comical performance than an actual sexual act.<sup>1008</sup> Then, the third scroll deliberately places emphasis on the men becoming more exhausted as the orgy goes on. At the same time, it accentuates the energetic women who even chase the men for more. Then, the fourth scroll depicts a woman who receives an award from the emperor, supposedly for the sexual prowess showed in the competition.<sup>1009</sup>

While Hiroshige's art clearly uses the supposed love affair between Shōtoku and Dōkyō as its basis, (that much could be concluded upon seeing both the name of the series and the depiction of monks among the competitors), it could be assumed that the artist's intention was not to ridicule or to criticize it. On the contrary, the series emphasizes the importance of the women in society as well as their inner and outer strengths which in some cases surpass those of the men. Considering that Emperor Shōtoku is also depicted in one of the scrolls as well as that the series are named after her, it could be speculated that Utagawa Hiroshige III's intention was rather to compliment the last female emperor of Nara Japan by portraying her as a leading figure in a composition which depicts the strengths of the women and their superiority over men. Furthermore, it could be surmised that Emperor Shōtoku is described as the epitome of female supremacy, as she had been a woman and an emperor, that is to say, she belonged to the stronger gender and at the same time occupied the most powerful position in the country. From that point of view, it could be concluded that Hiroshige's intention wasn't to ridicule the emperor or the monk but rather to portray their supposed sexual relationship as something not necessarily bad since intimate acts between men and women were considered an entertainment at court. Probably that was the reason why the scrolls depict a group of people engaged in the said activities. Through the presentation of many people who supposedly indulged in sexual acts, one could get the impression that that had been a popular way for people from all social classes to enjoy themselves.

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<sup>1006</sup> Yano 2013: 74

<sup>1007</sup> See pp. 335/336

<sup>1008</sup> See pp. 335/336

<sup>1009</sup> See pp. 335/336



While, on the one hand, the idea of a potential sexual relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô seems to not have been directly rejected by Hiroshige, on the other hand, the composition of the scrolls does not predispose one to freely assume that the author supported the notion. The emperor is seen only in the third scroll and it should be noted that she does not participate in any of the activities depicted in the previous two drawings. Her role is confined to that of an overseer of the whole event and of a figure of authority who rewards the winner in the competition. If Utagawa Hiroshige III intended to support the notion that there had been something more than a political alliance between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô, he would have been able to do it by simply depicting the last female ruler of Nara Japan as one of the people indulging in the sexual activities from the second scroll. On the contrary, she is portrayed as the guest of honour whose only duty was to watch the event and eventually to reward the winner, and thus a certain distance, both physical and moral, is created between the image of the emperor and that of the participants in the competition. On the other hand, considering the title of the scroll series, one could assume that Hiroshige wanted to depict Dôkyô as the main organisator and supporter of such sinful events at court, and thus to (in)directly criticize him by depicting him as immoral person. From that point of view, however, it could also easily be concluded that although Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku is not portrayed as a direct participant in such activities at court, she at least allowed, and thus supported, their organization. A subtle criticism could also be sensed if one considers the possibility that the emperor did not actually encourage those events. In that case, it would seem that the sovereign could not control Dôkyô who was given free rein to act as he wished.

All things considered, it could be concluded that the shunga scrolls from the Edo period offer a fresh perspective on history and on paradoxes or controversies which could not be easily explained in the official historical sources. As it could be seen, Hiroshige himself could not escape from the difficulties caused by the lack of information about certain aspects from Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's reign, for example, the nature of her relationship with Dôkyô. Therefore, despite having depicted the emperor mainly in a good light, he also subtly touched on the idea of her having been unable, or probably unwilling, to control the Buddhist monk and his decisions at court, and thus left the end assessment to the people observing the scrolls. From that point of view, it could be concluded that although the handscrolls depicted nothing innovative (the topic of the male genitals, their size in particular, and the importance of sexual activities for one's health had been discussed constantly and in different form throughout the different periods of Japanese history), authors like Utagawa Hiroshige III managed to combine old and new, and thus to create something unique for the Japanese art and its approach to history. Despite seemingly lacking in morality, the scrolls did not try to alter history or to speculate about things for which there was no historical explanation: something which could be considered the main weakness of the setsuwa stories. The shunga scrolls narrated the history in a new and entertaining way and in that aspect differed from the setsuwa genre, the main characteristic of which was to criticize and to supposedly educate the readers even at the cost of distorting the historical truth and rearranging it anew.

### [Nihon Ôdai Ichiran and its views on the last female ruler of Nara Japan](#)

Anyway, despite the fresh point of view offered by the shunga handscrolls, the compilation of chronicles of the reigns of the Japanese emperors, which proved to have been a favorite theme for the authors throughout the ages, continued also in the Edo period. The epoch's contribution to the matter was Hayashi Gahô's work *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran* (日本王代一覽, The Table of the Rulers of Japan) compiled in the 1650s. Gahô (also known as Hayashi Shunsai) was the son of Hayashi Razan, a distinguished Neo-Confucian scholar who devoted his life to the dissemination of Neo-Confucianism among the members of the Tokugawa shôgunate. Razan was acknowledged to such an extent that his

teachings and philosophy were included in the educational program of the samurai. Eventually, he reached the apex of his career in 1607 when he became a political advisor to the second shōgun Hidetada<sup>1010</sup>. Some time after that, Hayashi Razan became a rector at Edo's Confucian Academy, the Shōhei-kō. From that point of view, it should be no surprise that Razan's son Gahō chose to follow in his father's footsteps. He became an unofficial rector at the same academy. Much could be said about Gahō's talents as a scholar, but his hereditary title would be enough for one to understand his role in the Edo cultural world – it read Daigaku no kami ("head of the state university"). After the death of his father, Hayashi Gahō succeeded him as an advisor to the shōgun. Despite having compiled many chronicles such as *The Comprehensive History of Japan* (本朝通鑑, Honchō tsugan) from 1670, or the *Genealogy of the Houses of the Kan'ei Period* (寛永諸家系圖傳, Kanei shoka keizu den) from 1643<sup>1011</sup>, Gahō's *Nihon Ōdai Ichiran*, the French translation of which would be discussed here, remained his most acknowledged work in the Western world. With the compilation of the genealogy and chronicle of the emperors of Japan, Hayashi Gahō wanted to pay tribute to his father, his beliefs and his teachings. Completed in 1652, the work was published in Kyōto under the patronage of tairō (a rang equal to that of Prime Minister during the Edo period) Sakai Tadakatsu. Consisting of seven volumes, the chronicle encompasses the Age of the Gods and the chronicles of the emperors from Jimmu to Go-Yōzei (r. 1586 – 1611). It does not cover the reigns of the emperors who reigned during Gahō's own lifetime, which could probably be attributed to the sensitivity of the matter. After all, the author himself observed that "*in a book intended for the shogun's eyes, it is incumbent upon one to be circumspect.*"<sup>1012</sup> Considering Hayashi Gahō's own views on the matter, it could be assumed that he wrote in such a way which would have satisfied the sensitivities of the shōgun. In 1650, the shōgunate was still a young structure created by Tokugawa Ieyasu only some 47 years ago. It needed maximum power, political and religious but also rhetorical, for its leaders to be able to establish themselves as the rightful powerholders in the state. Moreover, Hayashi Gahō's patron Sakai Tadakatsu was the daimyō of the Obama-han (domain) in the Wakasa Province.<sup>1013</sup> That region belonged to the so-called fudai<sup>1014</sup> provinces. Therefore, it could be assumed that it was in the interests of both the shōgunate and its vassals to present the current regime as the best governmental form which Japan has ever had. From that point of view, it could be concluded that Gahō's way of writing and narrating the historical facts could not have been completely objective about certain matters.

Now, it would also be useful to say something about the translator of *Nihon Ōdai Ichiran*. Isaac Titsingh (1745 – 1812) was a Dutch diplomat, historian, Japanologist, and, last but not least, merchant. During his career in East Asia, he served as a senior official of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). His position made him responsible for the contacts with Tokugawa Japan, and thus Titsingh became one of the few Europeans who was allowed to travel to Edo in order to pay homage to the de-facto ruler of the country, the shōgun (at the time, Tokugawa Iyeharu).<sup>1015</sup> Although the regulations of the bakufu stated that the representatives of the VOC were allowed to sojourn in Japan only for a period of one year (for Titsingh, that would have been 1779), a loophole allowed an alternate tenure, which meant that they could

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<sup>1010</sup> See Nussbaum 2005: 301

<sup>1011</sup> See Nussbaum 2005: 300

<sup>1012</sup> See Hoffman 2006: A man in the soul of Japan

<sup>1013</sup> See Papinot 1906: 50/51

<sup>1014</sup> „...Ieyasu adopted the practice of converting even heads of collateral houses into dependent hereditary vassals (fudai), thus gaining a firmer grip over his senior military commanders.”/// „The concept of balance implies differences in degree of attachment or of reliability under shogunal command among several categories of daimyo, particularly between the “house” daimyo (fudai) and the “outside” daimyo (tozama).”, Hall, (b) 1991: 135, 150

<sup>1015</sup> Titsingh: 6/8

travel back and forth between Japan and the Company's other East-Asian bases.<sup>1016</sup> Thus, Isaac Titsingh was able to extend his stay in the island country to five years during which he began to dream of writing about the country, its life and its people. He hoped to make his works available to all by publishing them in the three European languages he regarded as crucial: *“Dutch, his native tongue and lingua franca – though only just – of East-Asian trade; French, the language of the philosophes and the Revolution; and English, the language of modern science.”*<sup>1017</sup> It should be noted that in the cases when he translated some original Japanese sources, for example Hayashi Gahô's *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran*, Titsingh was *“emphatic, ‘deem[ing] it preferable’ to present the Japanese ‘in their own dress’, with unaltered translations most ‘congenial with the purpose’, adding ‘nothing of my own’”,* thus trying to *“silence his voice as much as possible”*.<sup>1018</sup> His approach could be described as *“one of the most innovative and impressive aspects”*<sup>1019</sup> of his work. Nevertheless, despite his efforts to remain as precise as possible, doubts in regard to the level of his language proficiency still remained. After all, Titsingh himself admitted that *“he learned Japanese in two years”,* thus *“expos[ing] himself to the charge that he could not have learned it very thoroughly. Even allowing for total immersion and a degree of genius, this was just not enough time.”*<sup>1020</sup>

From that point of view, it could be expected that some passages or phrases would not fully correspond with the original Japanese manuscript. Thus, the possibility exists for Gahô's own biases on certain themes either to be expressed even stronger or to be alleviated and made almost invisible in the translation.

Unfortunately, the chronicles dedicated to Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku seem to prove the former. The narrative of the reign of Emperor Kôken begins somewhat unusually.

*“Kôken teno (Hiao kian thian houang), fille de Siômou, avait pour mère Kwomio kogou (Kouang ming houang heou), fille de Fousiwara-no Foufira. Comme Siômou n'avait pas de fils, sa fille lui succéda. Pendant le règne de Siômou, le célèbre Kibikô (Ky pi koug) l'avait instruite dans l'art de gou verner.”*

*[Kôken tennô (Hiao kian thian houang), daughter of Shômu, had for mother Kômyô Kôgô (Kouang ming houang heou), daughter of Fujiwara no Fuhito. As Shômu had no son, his daughter succeeded him. Still during Shômu's reign, the famous Kibi [no Makibi] (Ky pi koug) instructed her in the art of governance.]*<sup>1021</sup>

While the chronicle doesn't say anything wrong, the structure of the first sentence is interesting. It is reported that Kôken *“had for mother”* Kômyôshi, a fact which is not wrong but is presented in a peculiar way. It seems that the author wanted to emphasize the difference in status between Shômu and his Fujiwara wife. Thus, one gets the impression that it was natural for Kôken to have Shômu as her father. On the other hand, however, Kômyôshi was chosen among many others to give birth to her.

Then, the chronicle continues in the typical style of its predecessors by reporting the religious activities of the emperor until the article from the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Tenpyô shôho 10 (757).

*“La 3<sup>e</sup> lune, on priva Mitsi-no On-no o de la dignité de Taïsi, et on le renvoya à sa demeure. Quoique l'Oudaïsin Foushuara-no Toyo nari (Thengyuan Fungtchhing) représentât à*

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<sup>1016</sup> Titsingh: 6/8

<sup>1017</sup> Titsingh: 2

<sup>1018</sup> Titsingh: 3

<sup>1019</sup> Titsingh: 3

<sup>1020</sup> Titsingh: 4

<sup>1021</sup> *Nihon Ôdai Ichiran*, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 73

l'imperatrice que ce prince avait été élu Taïsi par son père, elle répliqua qu'elle en était mécontente et qu'elle ne voulait plus de lui.”

*[In the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, Prince Funado was removed from the position of Crown Prince and sent back to his home. Although Dainagon Fujiwara no Toyonari (Thengyuan Fungtchhing) pointed out that the prince had been appointed Crown Prince as per her father's wish, she replied that she was dissatisfied with him and didn't want him as her Crown Prince.]*<sup>1022</sup>

As it could be seen, Hayashi Gahô explained Prince Funado's deposition not as the result of his lack of respect and filial piety toward the late Emperor Shômu but as the personal decision of Emperor Kôken, who “*didn't want him as her Crown Prince*” despite him having been chosen by her father. In contrast to Shoku Nihongi, for example, Nihon Ôdai Ichiran presents the facts in a much more direct way. A subtle criticism of Emperor Kôken could be felt in the second sentence. It is deliberately pointed out that Prince Funado had been chosen by Emperor Shômu as a successor to his daughter. Instead of having been compliant with her father's wishes, however, Emperor Kôken deposed him on the grounds that she had been “*dissatisfied with him*” and that she “*didn't want him as her Crown Prince*”, and thus neglected her duties as a daughter. Filial piety was one of the main virtues taught by Confucianism. From that point of view, Emperor Kôken's decision to depose Prince Funado could be seen as a lack of filial piety because it was her father, the late Emperor Shômu, who chose the Prince as her successor.

Then, the chronicle continues with the brief narrative of Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy.

“Le 5<sup>e</sup> mois, l'impératrice alla demeurer au palais de Fousiwara-no Nakamaro, nommé Tamoura-no miya (Thian tsoun koung), et avança le propriétaire au rang de Sifi naïsiou (Tsu vvei nci siang), ou général en chef de la maison militaire de l'empereur, emploi qui équivaut à celui de Daïsin. Toyo nari, frère aîné de Nakamaro, n'était qu'Oudaïsin; et comme celui-ci fut élevé par la faveur de l'impératrice à un poste si élevé, il conçut une haine irréconciliable contre son frère. Tous les deux étaient petits-fils de Foufira et fils de Moutsimaro.

Naramaro, fils de Tatsibana-no Moroyé, jaloux du crédit de Nakamaro, conspira dans ce temps avec Ofan-no Komaro, pour l'assassiner, et élever de nouveau Mitsi-no On-no o au rang de Taïsi. Fousiwara-no Toyonari en fut instruit; mais il ne révéla pas le complot. Nakamaro l'ayant appris entra dans une grande colère. Il fit part au Daïri de ce qui se tramait, et l'on trancha la tête aux deux conspirateurs. Mitsi-no On-no o fut de même mis à mort, et Toyonari, pour avoir eu connaissance du complot sans le dénoncer, fut banni au Tsoukouzi.”

*[In the 5<sup>th</sup> month, the empress went to stay at Tamura-no-miya, the residence of Fujiwara no Nakamaro, and elevated him to the rank of Shibinaishô (Tsu vvei nci siang), or Supreme Military Official, position equivalent to that of Minister. Toyonari, elder brother of Nakamaro, was only Dainagon; and as the latter was elevated to such a high office because of the Emperor's favor toward him, Toyonari developed an irreconcilable hatred toward his brother. Both were grandsons of Fuhito and sons of Muchimaro.*

*Jealous of Nakamaro's influence, Naramaro, son of Tachibana no Moroe, conspired with Otomo no Komaro to assassinate Nakamaro and elevate Prince Funado again to the Crown Prince position. Fujiwara no Toyonari was informed of this, but he did not reveal the plot. Nakamaro, upon hearing of it, became very angry. He told the Emperor what was going on and the heads of the two conspirators were cut off. Prince Funado was likewise put to death and*

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<sup>1022</sup> Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

*Toyonari, for having known about the plot without denouncing it, was banished to Tsukushi.*<sup>1023</sup>

Aside from the narrative of the negative feelings between the brothers Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Toyonari, the chronicle also gives an explanation for the former's elevation to the position of Shibinaishō: apparently it had to do with the emperor's favor toward him. Thus, the tendency to explain any appointments made by the the last female ruler of Nara Japan by her favor toward the person involved had been continued by Hayashi Gahō. To be objective, however, Nihon Ōdai Ichiran doesn't speculate about the nature of the so-called "favor" of Emperor Kōken. Anyway, the chronicle reveals an interesting fact about the conspiracy – it seems to have been (in)directly supported by Nakamaro's brother Toyonari who, due to his hatred of his brother, didn't reveal the plot to the court. As a result, he was banished to Tsukushi. Unfortunately, Gahō's chronicle doesn't report the continuation of Toyonari's story. As it is revealed in Emperor Kōken's Imperial edict from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 8 (764), Nakamaro's older brother had been unjustly accused and only after the former Prime Minister's rebellion and death could he receive the praise which he deserved. Considering the fact that the Fujiwara were the first noble family which managed to attain absolute power at court through their close connections with the Imperial House, it could be assumed that they were the ones who paved the way for any other form of government different from the direct rule of the emperor. In that train of thought, they could be regarded as the political predecessors of the Tokugawa. At the same time, however, due to Fujiwara having been the first family different from the Imperial House which managed to hold onto political power for a significant period of time, they could also be considered political rivals to the Tokugawa. They represented a self-contained and independent form of government which relied on the emperor only as a means of justification for their own authority. For better or worse, any other powerful family after the Fujiwara, regardless of whether noble or warrior, strived for the same. Their dependency on the emperor finished after they had obtained the right to act as his proxies in the political world. From then on, they became independent rulers who didn't need his approval and rarely listened to his opinion on political matters. Ironically, the Fujiwara, despite having been the model which all other powerful families looked up to, represented the government of the nobles. On the other hand, the bakufu was a government founded by the head of a powerful military family who could, but ought not to, have been connected with the court. From that point of view, the Fujiwara could have been considered a bad influence on the society which the Tokugawa strived to create and to rule over. Therefore, a description of a powerful Fujiwara member as a person who was hated and despised not only by other courtiers but also by his own brother was the best way to inscribe a certain impression in the hearts of the people reading the historical work.

All things considered, it could be concluded that despite trying to be objective in his portrayal of the first reign of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, Hayashi Gahō could not escape from the political and cultural peculiarities of the period in which he compiled his work. The Neo-Confucian principles which were a pillar of the Tokugawa government could be seen in the chronicle narrating the deposition of Prince Funado. Although no direct criticism of Emperor Kōken is expressed, the sole fact that she refused to obey the wishes of her late father and thus demonstrated her lack of filial piety shows how her actions looked like in the eyes of society which abided by the Neo-Confucian teachings and principles. The indirect criticism continues in the chronicle narrating the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. In it, it is explicitly emphasized that Fujiwara no Nakamaro was elevated to a high court position thanks to the emperor's "favor". Although Hayashi Gahō did not speculate further about the

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<sup>1023</sup> Nihon Ōdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

nature of the said “favor”, there is certainly a criticism to be found in the fact that Nakamaro was not promoted thanks to his own talents but rather due to the sovereign’s feelings toward him.

On the other hand, the slightly negative sentiment expressed toward Emperor Kôken can not be found in the chronicle of Emperor Shôtoku. Interestingly enough, a big part of it is taken by the monk Dôkyô, his rise to power and, eventually, his fall from grace after the Dôkyô Incident. Similar to Emperor Kôken’s chronicle, the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku also begins in a slightly peculiar way.

“Siôtok teno (Tchhing tē thian houang), nommée auparavant Koken, reprit le gouvernement après la chute de Fitaï; de même que l'impératrice Kwogok ou Zaimé, elle eut deux noms.”

*[Shôtoku tennô (Tchhing tē thian houang), previously named Kôken, took over the government after the fall of Junnin; like the empress Kôgyoku/Saimei, she had two Imperial names.]*<sup>1024</sup>

In contrast to other chronicles or satirical texts from previous epochs (for example, Shoku Nihongi, Fusô Ryakuki, Kojidan), Nihon Ôdai Ichiran refers to the second reign of the last female ruler of Nara Japan as the reign of Emperor Shôtoku. What is more, she is compared with another female emperor who also ascended the throne two times and as a result, also had two Imperial names – Kôgyoku/Saimei. Thus, a certain continuity is established between the reigns of Kôgyoku/Saimei and Kôken/Shôtoku. On the other hand, however, Kôgyoku/Saimei had been one of those female rulers who could be described simply as throneholders. Her first reign was marked by Soga’s immense expansion at court and their eventual downfall at the hands of her son Prince Naka-no-Ôe, while her reascension was made possible due to Naka-no-Ôe’s wish to remain a Crown Prince in order for him to be able to navigate the political affairs at court without the restraints which a potential enthronement would have imposed on him. From that point of view, a comparison between Kôgyoku/Saimei and Kôken/Shôtoku in matters other than them having been the only female emperors who ascended the throne for a second time could be seen as inappropriate.

Anyway, the narrative continues by listing the positions to which Dôkyô had been elevated.

“A la 2<sup>e</sup> lune de la 1<sup>re</sup> des années Tenpe zingo (765), elle créa Dokiô Taïzio daïsin zensi (Taï ching ta tchhing chen szu). [...]

Le 10<sup>e</sup> mois, Dokiô fut déclaré Fotswô (Fa wang) ou roi de la loi; [...]

Le 1<sup>er</sup> mois de la 3<sup>e</sup> année (769), Dokiô fut logé dans l'intérieur du palais impérial, au pavillon occidental (Seïkiou); tous les officiers d'un rang inférieur au Daïsin le servaient.”

*[On the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Tenpyô-jingo (765), she elevated Dôkyô to the position of Dajô-daijin-zenshi (Taï ching ta tchhing chen szu). [...]*

*In the 10<sup>th</sup> month, Dôkyô was elevated to the position of Hô-ô (Fa wang) or King of the Law; [...]*

*In the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year (769), Dôkyô moved to the Western pavilion of the Inner Imperial Palace; all officers of a rank lower than Minister served him.]*<sup>1025</sup>

As a matter of fact, Nihon Ôdai Ichiran doesn’t speculate about the reasons for Dôkyô’s steady rise to power. It simply lists the positions which the monk received during Emperor Shôtoku’s reign. At the same time, as if to compensate the previous lack of criticism, the narrative reports the Dôkyô Incident in a most disapproving way.

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<sup>1024</sup> Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 78

<sup>1025</sup> Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 78/79

“Le 9<sup>e</sup> mois, Dasaïfou-no Asomaro (Ta tsai fou O tseng ma liu) avait dit à Dokiô: «Le dieu Ousa Fatsman m'est apparu en songe, et m'a annoncé «que si tu deviens Daïri, l'empire jouira d'un repos perpétuel.» Dokiô rapporta cette conversation à l'impératrice, qui lui répondit que, quoiqu'elle fût beaucoup de cas de lui, elle n'avait pas le droit de l'élever à cette dignité, mais qu'elle consulterait le dieu Fatsman et agirait suivant sa décision. Elle fit donc venir Waké-no Kiyomaro (Ho khi Thsing ma liu), et lui dit : «Le dieu'. Fatsman daïsin qui m'est apparu en songe, m'a ordonné de t'envoyer à Ousa, «afin de le consulter sur l'élection d'un Daïri: va-s-y , et rapporte-moi sa «réponse.»

Avant de partir, Waké-no Kiyomaro se présenta chez Dokiô, qui, ayant fait retirer tout le monde, lui raconta que l'impératrice avait l'intention de consulter le dieu Fatsman daïsin sur son élévation à la place de Daïri; qu'ainsi il devait lui apporter pour réponse que tel était en effet le desir de la divinité. Il lui promit qu'aussitôt qu'il serait Daïri, il le ferait Daïsin, et lui confierait l'administration de l'empire; le menaçant au contraire de le punir, s'il faisait un rapport défavorable à ses vues. Il lui jeta en même temps un regard sévère, et mit là main sur son sabre pour l'effrayer.

Sur la route, vers le temple d'Ousa Fatsman, Kiyomaro considéra que, quelle que fût la réponse du dieu, l'affaire était de la plus grande importance pour l'empire, et qu'elle méritait pour cette raison d'être mûrement pesée. Il résolut donc de supplier le dieu, avec la plus grande ferveur, de lui communiquer distinctement sa volonté. Dans cette intention, il entra dans le temple, où le dieu lui apparut en effet dans l'ombre. Il était haut de trente tsià (tchang, ou toises de dix pieds), et jetait un éclat comme la pleine lune. Kiyomaro se prosternadevant lui. Le dieu lui dit: «Dans notre empire, depuis la dynastie des «esprits célestes, et sous leurs descendants, nul être qui n'était pas de leur «souche n'a jamais été honoré de la dignité impériale. Il était donc inutile «de venir ici. Retourne sur tes pas; tu n'as rien à craindre de Dokiô.»

Kiyomaro grava profondément cette réponse dans sa mémoire, regagna la capitale et se présenta chez l'impératrice. Dokiô était avec elle pour apprendre le résultat de la mission de Kiyomaro. Celui-ci rendit fidèlement la réponse de Fatsman, qui avait manifesté son improbation de Dokiô; l'impératrice jugea de même que l'élévation de celui-ci serait insensée. Sur quoi Dokiô devint furieux: ses yeux étincelèrent, ses veines se gonflèrent, son visage était tantôt bleu, tantôt rouge; il respirait à peine; et regardant fixement Kiyomaro, il s'écria: «La réponse que tu prétends avoir été donnée par «le dieu, tu l'as inventée; tu es un imposteur.» Il voulut le faire mettre à mort, mais l'impératrice s'y opposa. Dans sa rage, il fit couper les tendons des pieds à Kiyomaro, changea son nom en Kegasimaro (Weï ma liu) ou le Maro sale, et le bannit à Osoumi. Il avait le dessein de le faire massacrer en route; mais un orage affreux, accompagné de tonnerre et d'éclairs, éclata; et l'impératrice, ayant appris son projet, lui défendit sévèrement de le mettre à exécution.

Kiyomaro ne pouvant plus marcher, parce que ses tendons étaient coupés, se fit porter au temple d'Ousa Fatsman, implora son secours, et fut guéri instantanément, au grand étonnement de ceux qui l'accompagnaient.”

*[In the 9<sup>th</sup> month, Dazaifu Asomaro (Ta tsai fou O tseng ma liu) said to Dôkyô: "The god Usa Hachiman revealed himself to me in a dream and announced that if you become Emperor, the empire will enjoy eternal peace". Dôkyô reported this conversation to the Empress, who replied that although she held him in a high esteem, she had no right to elevate him to this dignity, but that she would consult the god Hachiman and would act according to his decision. So, she summoned Wake no Kiyomaro (Ho khi Thsing ma liu) and said to him: "The Great Deity*

*Hachiman who revealed himself to me in a dream ordered me to send you to Usa in order to seek his advice on the election of an Emperor. Go ahead and bring me his answer."*

*Before leaving, Wake no Kiyomaro presented himself before Dôkyô, who, after making everyone leave, told him that the Emperor intended to consult the Great Deity Hachiman about his elevation to the position of Emperor; that, accordingly, Kiyomaro had to bring him such an answer which corresponds with the desire of the deity. He promised him that as soon as he became Emperor, he would make him Minister and entrust him with the administration of the state; on the contrary, if Kiyomaro brought back an answer unfavorable to him, he threatened to punish him. As he spoke, Dôkyô measured Kiyomaro with a stern look and put his hand on his sword in order to frighten him.*

*On his way to the temple of Usa Hachiman, Kiyomaro considered that whatever the response of the god, the matter was of greatest importance for the state and it should be therefore carefully assessed. He, therefore, was determined to implore the god with greatest fervor to communicate his will clearly. With such an intention, he entered the temple where the god revealed himself to him in the shade. He was over thirty feet tall and cast a glow like the full moon. Kiyomaro bowed down before him. The god said to him: "In our empire, since the dynasty of the celestial spirits and later during the reigns of their descendants, there had been not a single person honored with the Imperial dignity who didn't belong to their lineage. It is therefore unnecessary for you to come here. You should go back and do not fear of Dôkyô."*

*Kiyomaro engraved this answer deeply on his heart, returned to the capital and went to the Emperor's residence. Dôkyô was present to hear the outcome of Kiyomaro's mission. The latter faithfully reported the Hachiman's answer and the latter's disapproval of Dôkyô; the Emperor also decided that making Dôkyô Emperor would be insane. Dôkyô became furious: his eyes sparkled, his veins swelled, his face was sometimes blue, sometimes red; he was barely breathing; staring at Kiyomaro, he exclaimed: "The answer which you claim was given by the god was fabricated by you; you are an impostor." He wanted to have him executed, but the Emperor objected. In his rage, Dôkyô had Kiyomaro's tendons cut off, changed his name to Kegashimaro (Weï ma liu) or Dirty Maro, and banished him to Osumi. He intended to have him killed on the way; but a dreadful storm accompanied by thunder and lightning broke out; the Emperor, having learned of Dôkyô's plan, severely forbade him to put it into effect.*

*Kiyomaro, who could no longer walk, because of his tendons being cut, was taken to the temple of Usa Hachiman where he implored his help and was cured instantly to the astonishment of those who accompanied him.]<sup>1026</sup>*

In contrast to other sources that also report the Dôkyô Incident, Nihon Ôdai Ichiran is pretty direct in its assessment that "...the Empress [...] had no right to elevate him to this dignity, but that she would consult the god Hachiman and would act according to his decision." While the said narrative does not specifically say so, it could be speculated that it was not that Emperor Shôtoku "had no right to elevate" the monk to the position of emperor, but rather that she didn't want to do so without further counsel. Upon careful examination of the history of the Imperial House of Japan, it becomes clear that the appointment of a successor belonged to the prerogatives of the sovereign. Emperor Shômu, for example, elevated his daughter Imperial Princess Abe to the position of heir apparent despite the objections of the nobles. Later on, his daughter and successor Kôken deposed the Crown Prince chosen by her own father simply because she wanted to make that decision independently. During her second

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<sup>1026</sup> Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 79/80



reign as Emperor Shôtoku, the last female ruler of Nara Japan expressed her dissatisfaction with the fact that the courtiers pressured her into appointing a successor even though she was in no hurry to do so. In that train of thought, the saying that she supposedly *“had no right”* to appoint Dôkyô as an heir to the throne could not be taken at face value. According to Nihon Ôdai Ichiran’s narrative, it seems that the emperor did not believe the first oracle and needed a second opinion in order to decide on her next actions. Of course, the sentence could also be interpreted in a slightly different way. Since Emperor Shôtoku had been a female ruler, she didn’t have the authority to choose and appoint a successor herself, as that was not something which the female rulers (except Emperor Genmei) traditionally had done. Even if Hayashi Gahô wanted to (in)directly speculate about that particular matter, one should not forget the situation during the reign of Emperor Kôken when she single-handedly deposed the Crown Prince chosen by her father. That would prove that despite having been a female sovereign, Shôtoku still had the authority to choose her successor.

Anyway, the narrative continues with criticism of Dôkyô. According to the chronicle, he threatened Wake no Kiyomaro before the latter’s departure for Usa. Very interesting are Kiyomaro’s thoughts that *“the matter was of greatest importance for the state and it should be therefore carefully assessed.”* On the one hand, the statement gives the impression that Wake no Kiyomaro understood the importance of the matter and wanted to fulfill his duty with utmost diligence. On the other hand, if one considers the Shoku Nihongi narrative according to which Emperor Shôtoku punished both Kiyomaro and his sister Hôkin on accusation of having deceived the sovereign, that statement could be understood also as Wake no Kiyomaro’s firm decision to make anything possible to prevent Dôkyô’s potential accession to the throne. After Kiyomaro’s return from Usa with the deity’s second oracle, the narrative explains that the monk became *“furious”* upon hearing the report. At the same time, the phrase *“the Emperor also decided that making Dôkyô Emperor would be insane.”* serves to prove the assumption that Emperor Shôtoku was not particularly eager to step down in favor of her monk minister. The narrative then continues with Wake no Kiyomaro’s punishment. Interestingly enough, the Nihon Ôdai Ichiran chronicle contradicts the Imperial edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) according to which the emperor herself ordered the sentences of Kiyomaro and Hôkin. Hayashi Gahô’s work, however, describes both the change of Kiyomaro’s name and his banishment to Ôsumi as Dôkyô’s doing, and thus denies Shôtoku’s involvement in it. What is more, it is reported that the furious Dôkyô *“intended to have him killed on the way”*, but the emperor *“having learned of Dôkyô’s plan, severely forbade him to put it into effect.”*, which portrays her as a benevolent ruler who cherished her subjects and didn’t want them to be executed without reason.

After the report on the Dôkyô Incident and Emperor Shôtoku’s way of handling it, the chronicle continues with the narrative of her last days. Interestingly enough, Nihon Ôdai Ichiran puts emphasis on the narrative from the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3/Hôki 1 (770) according to which several months before her death, the emperor visited Dôkyô’s home province Kawachi and was welcomed there by the monk himself.

“Le 2<sup>e</sup> mois de la 4<sup>e</sup> année (770), l'impératrice se rendit au palais d'Oughi no miya (Yeou ki koug) dans la province de Kawatsi. Dokiô lui servit quell ques plats extraordinaires.

Elle revint le 4<sup>e</sup> mois à la résidence; au 6<sup>e</sup>, elle tomba très-malade, et aucun remède n'eut d'effet; tout espoir de la voir guérir s'évanouit. Dokiô en fut enchanté, car il se flattait de lui succéder.

L'impératrice mourut à la 8<sup>e</sup> lune, âgée de 53 ans. La dernière fois elle avait régné 6 ans, la première 10 ans; ainsi elle a occupé le trône en tout 16 ans.”

*[In the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 4<sup>th</sup> year (770), the Emperor went to Ôgi-no-miya (Yeou ki koug) in the province of Kawachi. Dôkyô served her only extraordinary dishes.*

*In the 4<sup>th</sup> month, she returned to her residence; in the 6<sup>th</sup> month, she fell very ill and no remedy seemed to have any effect; all hope of her getting better vanished. Dôkyô was delighted by this, for he flattered himself that he would succeed her.*

*The Emperor died in the 8<sup>th</sup> month at the age of 53. Her second reign lasted 6 years, the first was for 10 years; thus, she occupied the throne for a total of 16 years.]<sup>1027</sup>*

As it could be seen, the report about the emperor's death comes directly after the narrative of her visit to Kawachi where she had been welcomed by Dôkyô and he supposedly "served her only extraordinary dishes." It is pointed out that she returned from Kawachi in the 4<sup>th</sup> month of 770 and became very ill only two months after that. What was worse, "no remedy seemed to have any effect." The chronicle even reports that "all hope of her getting better vanished. Dôkyô was delighted by this, for he flattered himself that he would succeed her." Thus, the two chronicles paint a picture in which Dôkyô was apparently involved in Emperor Shôtoku's death. The part in which it is narrated that he "served her only extraordinary dishes" is probably deliberately reported only to strengthen that impression. The same could be said about the remark that "no remedy seemed to have any effect." Moreover, any uncertainties over the matter would disappear upon reading the sentence "Dôkyô was delighted by this, for he flattered himself that he would succeed her." From that sentence, it becomes clear that Gahô wanted to portray the monk as the one responsible for the emperor's death. Combined with the report about the Dôkyô Incident in which it is explained that Shôtoku didn't want to make the monk her successor and did everything in her power to prevent it, it seems that Dôkyô held a grudge against her and decided to poison her in hope that after her death, he would be able to ascend the throne.

All in all, it could be concluded that Hayashi Gahô's Nihon Ôdai Ichiran is a most unusual source. While in the chronicle of Emperor Kôken one could feel a negative sentiment toward the last female ruler of Nara Japan which could be attributed to the strong influence of the Neo-Confucian principles reigning over the Edo society, the chronicle of Emperor Shôtoku gives a somewhat different impression. At the beginning, one sees a comparison between Kôken/Shôtoku and Kôgyoku/Saimei which could be understood as a flattery and recognition for the last female ruler of Nara Japan, on the one hand, but also as a deliberate attempt to diminish her authority as a ruler, on the other hand. At the same time, the narrative of the Dôkyô Incident strongly emphasizes the fact that Emperor Shôtoku didn't want to appoint the monk minister as her successor and eventually even directly opposed him by stopping the murder of Wake no Kiyomaro. Being unable to proceed with Kiyomaro's "killing", the monk had to satisfy his desire for revenge with changing the former's name and exiling him. Thus, Nihon Ôdai Ichiran contradicts the Imperial edict of Emperor Shôtoku herself in which she ordered the punishment of both Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister Hôkin. One could suppose that the controversy is deliberately created in order for the author to be able to portray Emperor Shôtoku as a ruler who strongly opposed the notion that a person outside the Imperial House could ascend the throne. The narrative of her death in which it is strongly insinuated that the emperor had actually been poisoned by Dôkyô, who apparently never lost the hope of becoming emperor, portrays the last female emperor of Nara Japan as a tragic figure. All things considered, Isaac Titsingh's translation of Nihon Ôdai Ichiran does not influence the chronicle to the point that one could not see the skillful portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's development as a person and a ruler. While she had been initially presented as an unfilial daughter who didn't abide by her father's wishes, the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku describes her as a strong-willed and a principled ruler who didn't yield to the pressure exerted by a power-hungry

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<sup>1027</sup> Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 80/81

monk and opposed him even at the cost of her own life. Such portrayal is most unusual, as it could not be found in any other source from earlier or later times. It is understandable that Hayashi Gahô presented Emperor Kôken as an unfilial daughter since the Neo-Confucian principles strongly influenced the Edo-period values. On the other hand, however, the portrayal of Emperor Shôtoku as a tragic ruler who lost her life while trying to suppress the “bad monk” is definitely unusual. Here, it should be noted that Hayashi Gahô wanted to present Dôkyô as a power-hungry person who lacked any moral values and eventually even committed the great sin of murdering his ruler in a treasonous attempt to ascend the Imperial throne. It could not be speculated that such portrayal had anything to do with generally bad sentiments toward Buddhism. While Neo-Confucianism had been the dominant school of thought during the Edo period, Buddha’s teaching had never been persecuted by the government. It could even be described as the second strongest ideology during the epoch. An assumption that the Tokugawa government held any special sentiments toward the Imperial House could also be denied. After all, they were the family which took all authority away from the emperor and practically established a dictatorship in which the sovereign was a mere figurehead. At the same time, the opening sequence of Emperor Shôtoku’s chronicle in which she is compared with another female emperor who could be described as a throneholder can serve as a hint about how one should assess the seemingly positive portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan. Thus, any positive or negative description of hers would be interpreted through the prism of the view that she had been a woman: a person who was not meant to occupy the throne for a long period of time but who simply had to hold it until the ascension of a male successor. Anyway, while such thoughts remain only as speculations, it is a fact that Nihon Ôdai Ichiran presents an unusual portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan which could be assessed as neither entirely positive nor completely negative.

## Modern times

### The downfall of the Tokugawa bakufu and Japan’s rebirth as a modern state

Similar to its predecessors the Minamoto and the Ashikaga shôgunates, the Tokugawa bakufu also couldn’t stand the test of time. During the reign of the 8<sup>th</sup> shôgun Yoshimune (r. 1716 – 1745), the system established by Tokugawa Ieyasu and solidified by his son and his grandson Hidetada and Iemitsu began to show first signs of weakness. At the beginning of their hold on power, the Tokugawa shôguns established an apparatus with which they were able to control all daimyô in the country. It went under the name of sankin kôtai, which could be roughly translated as “alternate residence”. According to its regulations, all daimyô were obligated to spend several months in the capital away from their domains.<sup>1028</sup> Thus, the potential prospects of resurrection were diverted by the simple fact that the landlords could not settle in their own fiefs for a long enough period of time. At the same time, as they were obligated to spend several months in Edo, they had to maintain residences there, which inevitably strained their financial independence. As it could be seen, the sankin kôtai was a wisely developed system with which the government controlled the landlords and ensured its own authority. Unfortunately, the first signs of the Tokugawa government’s downfall could be felt namely in the implementation of that system. During the reign of the 8<sup>th</sup> shôgun Yoshimune, the bakufu had financial problems which could not be easily overlooked. In an attempt to stabilize the economy, the shôgun altered the regulations of the sankin kôtai and allowed the daimyô to spend half a year in their own estates in the province. In exchange for that freedom and them being exempted from the need to maintain residences in the capital, the daimyô were asked to pay taxes for the first time since Tokugawa took the reins of the government.<sup>1029</sup> As it turned out, the catastrophic idea of Tokugawa Yoshimune entailed a series of serious consequences. Not only could it not improve the economic

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<sup>1028</sup> See Tsukahira 1966: 28

<sup>1029</sup> See Tsukahira 1966: 50, 115/116, 119

situation in the country but it also managed to undermine the authority of the bakufu. When the shōgun reverted the implementation of the sankin kōtai to its initial regulations from 1730, it turned out that a big number of the landlords simply didn't show in the capital, which forced the government to give them a warning.

The shaken authority of the bakufu suffered another impact in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when foreign ships reached the Japanese coasts and demanded the opening of the country for foreign trade.<sup>1030</sup> In 1852, American vessels under Commodore Matthew Perry arrived and forced negotiations which eventually ended with the government giving permission for foreigners to trade in Japanese ports, as well as giving all American citizens on Japanese soil a special status. These first concessions were soon extended to European countries, which effectively put an end to the policy of seclusion led by the government since 1635.<sup>1031</sup> Unfortunately for the bakufu, the situation strengthened the impression of the faltering Tokugawa government. Eventually, the provincial lords were left to their own devices, as the bakufu simply was not in a stance, neither political nor military, to oppose the foreigners. As a result, many daimyō began to sought contact with Western traders and to arm themselves with modern weapons. Having seen these developments, the bakufu tried to initiate reforms in an attempt to mend the broken relationships between the government and the Imperial court, on the one hand, and the government and the provincial lords, on the other hand. In order to show his good will on the matter, the 14<sup>th</sup> shōgun Iemochi (r. 1858 – 1866) even expressed his wish to visit Kyōto and thus set a dangerous precedent.<sup>1032</sup> In the history of the almost 300-year-long Tokugawa reign, no shōgun had ever visited the Imperial capital, as it would have undermined the authority of the government. In addition, the shōgun basically put an end to the sankin kōtai system by ordering that its regulations should be implemented once in three years, which weakened the Tokugawa hold on power even further. As a result, the daimyō began to visit the Imperial capital more often and to build residences there, thus completely ignoring the shōgun's capital Edo. The powerful landlords of Satsuma, Chōshū and Tosa openly began to disobey the government and sided with the emperor to whom they supposedly wanted to return the absolute power taken forcefully away by the Tokugawa.<sup>1033</sup> Eventually, the latter's 300-year-long reign came to an end in 1868 when the bakufu army was defeated by the combined forces of Satsuma and Chōshū.<sup>1034</sup> Thus, authority was given back to the emperor in what remained in history as the Meiji Restoration.

The following Meiji (1868 – 1912), Taishō (1912 – 1926) and Shōwa (1926 – 1989) periods marked the centralization of the Japanese state under Imperial rule, the striving for modernization and the pursuit of the Western world's technological and scientific progress. Despite the bombastic words of giving the emperor his lost authority back utilized as a slogan by the daimyō of Satsuma and Chōshū, power was never really restored to the sovereign. It simply changed hands from Tokugawa to the leaders of the Restoration. The Meiji Constitution promulgated in 1889 stated in its Article 4 that

“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.”<sup>1035</sup>

but despite that, authority was only nominally given back to the head of the state. In fact, it was the government, at first constituted by the leaders of the Meiji Restoration, which took care of all important political matters. That reality didn't change even after the aftershocks of the fall of the

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<sup>1030</sup> See Heitzman 1992: 34/35

<sup>1031</sup> See Jansen 2002: 274/279

<sup>1032</sup> Jansen 2002: 300/301

<sup>1033</sup> See Tsukahira 1966: 134/136

<sup>1034</sup> See Jansen 2002: 312

<sup>1035</sup> The Constitution of the Empire of Japan 11.02.1889

Tokugawa government died out. In fact, it became even clearer, especially after Japan began its pursuit of the Western world in matters such as technology and innovations. The last years of the Tokugawa rule showed the daimyō that a state could not be considered strong if it didn't have the military power to back up its declarations. At the same time, the military prowess was highly dependent on technology and innovation. Thus, the newly formed Meiji government made the industrial and technological development of Japan its number one priority. Delegations were sent to Western countries and foreign help was sought for the establishment of a working modern economy and military. For a relatively short period of time, the Japanese spirit combined with the Western know-how in political, technological and economic matters transformed Japan into a leading economic power in East Asia. Parallel to that, Western strategies and military systems were carefully studied, and Japanese cadets were sent to Western societies in order to learn and bring back innovative military knowledge. A law enacted in 1872 (and enforced in 1873) required the mandatory service of all able-bodied men, thus overturning the Edo-period class restrictions for military service.<sup>1036</sup> Despite the constant modernization, the reorganization of existing structures and the establishment of new ones, it was also a fact that the army was still not tested in actual military conditions. All changed in 1877 when Saigō Takamori led a rebellion of the samurai dissatisfied with the reforms. Eventually, the borrowed Western military knowledge repaid the invested efforts, as Saigō and his people were killed and the rebellion was suppressed.<sup>1037</sup>

Some time later, Japan's participation in the World War I on the side of the Allied Powers only boosted the economic development of the state and the pride in its military. Japan used the opportunity to occupy Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, both Chinese territories, on the pretext that the Chinese government did not return the loans given to it in 1917/18.<sup>1038</sup> Thus, Japan came out of the World War I as both economic and military power with territorial claims on the continent. These developments only strengthened the innate Japanese belief in the uniqueness of the country and the sense of superiority stemming therefrom. A new nationalistic ideology centered around the emperor was established<sup>1039</sup> according to which the sovereign was considered a living deity. That creed combined with the Japanese military power and economic development fueled the dreams of territorial expansion. In 1937, Japan attacked China, thus beginning a full-scale war between the two countries.<sup>1040</sup> In the same year, the government began negotiations for an alliance with Germany, in an attempt to find an ally for its endeavors on the continent. At the same time, the USA expressed their support for China, thus putting a brake on the Japanese ambitions for East Asian dominance and predetermining the Japanese participation in the World War II on the side of the Axis. These dreams combined with the nationalistic ideology and the strong Japanese spirit drove the army to its limits. Japan remained the last Axis country which continued to oppose the Allies until the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that forced its surrender. The defeat was followed by a period of Allied occupation during which General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allies, requested the so-called Humanity Declaration from Emperor Hirohito in which the latter had to deny his status as a living deity.<sup>1041</sup> According to the new Constitution promulgated in 1946, the

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<sup>1036</sup> See Norman 1943: 4

<sup>1037</sup> See Jansen 2002: 369

<sup>1038</sup> „As early as 1823 the political economist Satō Nobuhiro (1769–1850) wrote that Japanese expansion should begin with “the place we can most easily take, Manchuria, which we can seize from China. It will not be difficult for us to take advantage of China's decline.”, Jansen 2002: 577/578

<sup>1039</sup> It was strongly supported by texts such as *Kokutai no hongi* (国体の本義, “Cardinal Principles of the National Body/Structure”) (1937) and *Shinmin no michi* (臣民の道, “Way of Subjects”) (1941).

<sup>1040</sup> See Jansen 2002: 619

<sup>1041</sup> See Jansen 2002: 668/669

sovereign was reduced simply to a figurehead forbidden from participating in politics.<sup>1042</sup> At the same time, a democratic political system slowly began to take its form as new political parties were formed. The 1950s remained in history as a period of rapid economic development known as the “Japanese Miracle” during which the Japanese economy grew three times faster than those of the other world powers.<sup>1043</sup>

Anyway, with such tumultuous occurrences taking place almost one after another, one would probably ask about the role of the women in the formation of modern Japan. According to Judit Árokay, while there were certain changes in the views on the females and their position in society during the Meiji period, the women were actually not able to win their societal freedom back.

“Als Reaktion auf die gesellschaftliche Situation, auf Hungersnöte, Aufstände und Kriege in der ausgehenden Edo-Zeit und wegen des Vertrauensverlustes der alten Religionen, wurden in der Meiji-Zeit (1868-1912) neue Sekten gegründet, diesmal auch von Frauen. Deren Sicht ist eindeutig frauenfreundlich, verneint jegliche Unreinheit und Benachteiligung im Prozess der Heilserlangung und unterscheidet sich darin auch von neuen Gründungen durch Männer... Und trotzdem konnten auch diese Gruppen nicht zur Speerspitze der Emanzipationsbewegung werden. Sie mussten sich, um als Sekten zu überleben, in die patriarchalische Ordnung des erstarkenden Tennô-Systems einordnen: Daraus resultierte die Anpassung an traditionell japanische Werte wie die Folgsamkeit dem Familienoberhaupt gegenüber, Beachtung der traditionellen Aufgabenteilung innerhalb der Familie, was die Ordnung und den Frieden sichern sollte.“<sup>1044</sup>

Thus, the women remained more or less confined to the notion of their inferior position to the men that has weaved its way through the Japanese society since the end of the Heian period and the beginning of the Kamakura period.

### Sakaguchi Angô and his portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku

The turbulent times after the fall of the Tokugawa bakufu inevitably influenced the cultural development of the country. Similar to all other parts of the state machine, culture also tried to find its way amidst the modernization and reorganization of Japan. The spread of mass media, for example, played an immense, and not always positive, role in the development of the Japanese culture. Shortly after the Meiji Restoration, radio and television began to find their way into the people’s hearts. While that brought Japan one step closer to the Western societies, it also undermined the traditional values of the society. Many voices were raised in support of all things Western, while all things Japanese were considered crude and barbaric. An example of these developments could be found in the events which took place in regard to the traditional Japanese sport sumô. Respected before the Restoration, it was threatened with prohibition after it due to articles which propagandized against it and its practicing.<sup>1045</sup> Many years of struggle had to pass for sumô to be recognized for what it is: the national traditional sport of Japan, something tightly connected with the Japanese indigenous religion and the Japanese value system, which also represented the Japanese spirit and the Japanese identity.

Later on, the marked by war Taishô and Shôwa periods did little for the positive development of culture. While the Meiji era was dominated by strong pro-Western sentiments, the next two epochs in Japanese history turned out to be namely the opposite. The nationalistic tendencies which rediscovered old ideologies and beliefs such as those about the uniqueness of Japan as a land chosen

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<sup>1042</sup> See The Constitution of Japan 03.11.1946

<sup>1043</sup> See Jansen 2002: 727/733

<sup>1044</sup> Árokay 2003: 191

<sup>1045</sup> See Kanda 1874, trans. by Braisted 1976: 237; Kazami 2002, trans. by Maeda 2007: 6

by the gods, or those about the godly descent of the emperor, pushed the culture on a strong pro-Japanese path on which the media's (television, newspapers, films, radio, and so on) purpose was to serve the interests of the government. New ideas were hardly allowed since the main objective of the culture and its numerous vessels was to portray Japan in a highly idealistic manner. The inability of the Japanese culture to find the balance between the West and the domestic nationalism seemed to have affected the parts of it which communicated their ideas by means of writing. The Westernization of the culture during the Meiji period, followed by the attempts of the nationalistic governments to suppress any new ideas and to push the media on the path of blind submission to the state's wishes collided with the free spirit of some writers. They could not accept the changes in the Japanese society and criticized the path followed by the state. The main characters in their works were dissolute and aimless anti-heroes who reflected the authors' own views on the society and the world around them. The movement of these writers became especially strong during the World War II. In the 1940s, that group of freedom-seeking artists was given the name "hooligan writers" (無頼派, buraiha).<sup>1046</sup> One such hooligan was Sakaguchi Angô. He was born in Niigata in 1906 as the 12<sup>th</sup> out of 13 children.<sup>1047</sup> His youth was strongly marked by the emergence of Japan as a military power and its dreams of a territorial expansion on the continent.<sup>1048</sup> Angô's father had a fully developed personality: he was the president of the local newspaper Niigata Shimbun, as well as a politician and a poet. The last aspect of his father's persona influenced the young Angô<sup>1049</sup> who knew since an early age that he wanted to become a writer. At the age of 17, the youth decided to leave Niigata and to go to Tôkyô in pursuit of his dreams. Unfortunately, his father died one year later and Angô was forced to work as a substitute teacher to pay back his father's debts.<sup>1050</sup> He was eventually forced to put his dreams of becoming an author on hold at the age of 20. Unfortunate as the situation was, Angô didn't fall into despair. Instead, he found his spiritual path and became interested in Buddhism. He even decided to go back to university in order to study Indian philosophy.<sup>1051</sup> After his graduation at the age of 25, Angô decided to give his initial dream to become a writer a try. His first works on various themes revealed his emotional maturity and his attitude toward the world.<sup>1052</sup> Despite the initial positive response to his work, it took Sakaguchi Angô years before he managed to establish himself as an influential figure in the Japanese literary world. The first work of his which won him recognition was "A Personal View of Japanese Culture" from 1942.<sup>1053</sup> The piece which truly made a mark on the Japanese literary world, however, was the essay "Darakuron" ("Discourse on Decadence") from 1946. Published after Japan's defeat in the World War II, "Darakuron"'s tone that described the reality of the Japanese society could be regarded as cynical. At the same time, it provided a piece of hope since it talked about failure which could pave the way for the creation of something new and beautiful.<sup>1054</sup> As it could be seen, Sakaguchi was a person with free views on and unbiased assessments of the world surrounding him. He didn't confine himself to one specific area, but followed his interests instead. For that reason, his works varied in their genre and themes. The philosophical "Darakuron" reflected only a part of his writer's soul. In

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<sup>1046</sup> „During the postwar period from 1946 to 1950, the name Burai-ha was given to a group of writers including Ango. They were also called as Shin-gesaku-ha. They all shared the belief that the defeat in the war meant a new start for the Japanese people.”, Yi 2011: 17

<sup>1047</sup> See Yi 2011: 5

<sup>1048</sup> See Yi 2011: 7

<sup>1049</sup> „There was not much of a father-son relationship between Niichirô and Ango. [...] The only times he paid attention to Ango was when he wanted Ango to prepare ink for him.”, Yi 2011: 5/6

<sup>1050</sup> See Yi 2011: 9/10

<sup>1051</sup> See Yi 2011: 10

<sup>1052</sup> See Yi 2011: 11/16

<sup>1053</sup> See Yi 2011: 16

<sup>1054</sup> See Yi 2011: 16/17

1947, he wrote the piece “The Nonserial Murder Incident” for which he was awarded in the mystery genre.<sup>1055</sup> In the same year, he ventured even further by writing the novel „Dôkyô” (道鏡) dedicated to the life of Emperor Shôtoku’s monk minister and the interactions between him and Emperor Shôtoku. In 1952, the work “Dôkyô dôji” (道鏡童子; The boy Dôkyô) was published in which Angô once more expressed his views on the circumstances around these two historical personalities. Unfortunately for the Japanese literary world, however, Sakaguchi died several years later, in 1955, at the age of 48 from a brain aneurysm.<sup>1056</sup>

#### Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku’s portrait in „Dôkyô” (道鏡)

Typical of all biographies or historical novels is that they almost always begin with a description of the respective historical figure’s early years. Apparently Sakaguchi Angô’s book “Dôkyô” is no exception. According to him,

“彼女は天下第一の人格として、世に最も尊貴な、そして特別な現人神として育てられ、女としての心情が当然もとむべき男に就ては教へられてみながつたからだ。結婚に就ては教へられもせず、予想もされてみながつた。父母の天皇皇后はそのやうに彼女を育て、そして甚だ軽率に彼女の高貴な娘氣質を盲信した。我々の娘だ。特別な娘だ。男などの必要の筈はない、と。

首皇子を育ててくれた祖母の元明天皇も、伯母の元正天皇も、未亡人で、独身だつた。彼女等の身持は堅かつた。そして聖武天皇は、当然孤独な性格をもつ女支配者の威厳に就て、見馴れるまゝに信じこみ、疑つてみたこともなかつた。彼は全然知らなかつた。祖母も伯母も、女としての自由意志が殺されてみたことを。彼女等は自ら選んで犠牲者に甘んじてみた。彼女等の慾情は首皇子を育てることの目的のために没入され、その目的の激しさに全てがみたされてみた。彼女等は家名をまもる虫であり、真実自由な女主人ではなかつたのだといふことを。

この二つの女主人の、根柢的な性格の差異を、聖武天皇はさとらなかつた。”

*[...as the first and foremost person in the whole country, she was raised as the most noble and the most special living deity, but as a woman, she was not taught that it was natural to give her heart to a man. She wasn’t taught anything concerning marriage, since marriage was not something expected from her. Her parents, the emperor and the empress, brought her up in such a way, and thoughtlessly believed in her noble virgin disposition. “It is our daughter, after all. Our special daughter. She wouldn’t possibly need the likes of a man.”*

*Emperor Genmei, the grandmother who brought up Prince Obito was a widow, and his aunt Emperor Genshō had been unmarried. They had been strong women. For that reason, Emperor Shōmu believed in the dignity of a female sovereign for whom it was natural to live in solitude, and he never doubted it. He had no idea that in both his grandmother’s and his aunt’s cases, their free will as women had been crushed long ago. They indulged in being victims, something*

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<sup>1055</sup> See Yi 2011: 18

<sup>1056</sup> See Yi 2011: 18



*which they themselves had chosen. They were passionately devoted to their objective of raising Prince Obito and they were consumed by the intensity of that goal. Since they were considered protectors of the family's honor, they could never be regarded as free women.*

*Emperor Shōmu did not recognize the difference in the fundamental nature of these two women.]*<sup>1057</sup>

As it could be seen, Sakaguchi Angō paints a rather critical picture of Imperial Princess Abe's upbringing. Apparently he puts all the blame for the fact that she remained unmarried on her parents who, absorbed in their own importance as the "Sun couple", believed that their daughter would have been satisfied to be a "Daughter of the Sun" and would not have pursued this-worldly happiness. Thus, Sakaguchi Angō brings a completely different perspective to the issue of the unmarried female rulers. As it was already discussed in previous chapters, the role of the Imperial Princess in ancient Japan was strictly defined. She either was married off to a noble with the idea of ensuring the stability of the Imperial House or was sent to Ise in order to represent the Imperial family as a servant of the Sun Goddess. At the same time, however, there were some cases when the throne remained vacant for a short period of time due to the death of the previous sovereign and his successor having been too young to ascend. Thus, a new third role was assigned to Imperial Princesses such as Hidaka, the future Emperor Genshō, or Abe, the future Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku. They were not needed in the capacity as mothers or high priestesses but as protectors of the stability and continuity of the Imperial House. Having Imperial blood coursing through their veins, they were considered a solution to a temporary succession issue. By assuming the role of throne protectors, or for that matter throneholders, however, they had to give up of their dreams of having a husband or children. The reason for that was simple: the possibility existed that their potential children would spark a succession struggle in the future. As Sakaguchi Angō explicitly points out, however, the circumstances of Imperial Princess Hidaka and those of Imperial Princess Abe were in no way similar. In Hidaka's case, she ascended the throne with a mission: to ensure the ascension of Crown Prince Obito, the future Emperor Shōmu. In Abe's case, however, there was no successor for whom she had to "hold" the throne. That was also the reason why she was appointed to the position of Crown Prince and later ascended the throne as Emperor Kōken. Unfortunately, however, nobody was able to discern that difference and thus the principles valid for the "throneholder" Emperor Genshō had also been applied to Emperor Kōken. That is probably the reason for Sakaguchi Angō's remark that

“この女帝ほど壮大な不具者はみなかった。”

*[No one had ever been as magnificently crippled as that female emperor.]*<sup>1058</sup>

After all, her parents arbitrarily chose a lonely and unhappy future for their daughter and tried to compensate for that by making her emperor. Unfortunately, however, neither her loneliness nor her enthronement were things which Imperial Princess Abe personally wished for or chose of her own free will.

According to Sakaguchi's narrative, while Shōmu was still alive, he supported his daughter and gave her advice on political matters.

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<sup>1057</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 10/11

<sup>1058</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 10

“新女帝の治世の始めは、まだ存命の父母に見まもられて、危なげはなかつた。政治はむつかしいものではなかつた。たゞ全国的な大きな田地を所有する地主であり、その毎年の費用のために税物を割当て、とりあげるのが政治であつた。”

*[At the beginning of her reign, the new female emperor felt safe, as she was protected by her parents. After all, politics were not something extremely complicated: since the Emperor owned rice fields across the country, her job consisted of allocating and collecting taxes for her annual expenses.]*<sup>1059</sup>

That description of the political talent of Emperor Kōken slightly changes the impression created by the previous two examples. In comparison with the previous two cases in which Imperial Princess Abe/Emperor Kōken was described as a pitiful woman and an extremely burdened ruler due to the role which her parents played in her life, here one sees a much different portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan: that of an incapable ruler who depended on her parents for support and guidance in political matters. Moreover, her understanding of politics is shown as having been only rudimentary, as she apparently regarded the role as a sovereign as a position responsible for the collection and the allocation of taxes in the Imperial fiefs across the country. Thus, one sees a rather negative development of Emperor Kōken’s portrayal, which considering the fact that, according to Sakaguchi, she was controlled by her parents since her birth, should be no wonder.

Even though one could get the impression that Emperor Kōken was content to be “*protected by her parents*”, that speculation is quickly denied upon reading Sakaguchi Angō’s commentary on the death of Shōmu and Kōmyōshi.

“上皇が死んだ。つゞいて母太后も死んだ。女帝は遂に我身の自由を見出した。”

*[The retired emperor died, followed by her mother, the empress dowager. The female emperor finally discovered her freedom.]*<sup>1060</sup>

As it is implied in the second sentence, the death of Emperor Kōken’s parents meant that she was finally free: she didn’t have to do anything against her own will nor did she have to obey Shōmu’s and Kōmyōshi’s wishes. It could therefore be assumed that, as it is also explicitly mentioned in the previous passage, Kōken was content with her parents’ guidance only “*at the beginning of her reign*”. Obviously, the passage of time made her feel uncomfortable with Shōmu’s and Kōmyōshi’s interference in her life and political career. From that point of view, it should be no wonder that after their death, she “*finally discovered her freedom*”. These two sentences continue Sakaguchi’s tendency to portray Kōken/Shōtoku’s parents as insensitive people who didn’t regard their daughter as an individual but rather as their appendage that they could command to obey their will.

Anyway, the result of that feeling of freedom could be seen in Sakaguchi Angō’s narrative regarding Prince Funado’s deposition and the appointment of Prince Ōi as Emperor Kōken’s Crown Prince.

“孝謙天皇の皇太子は道祖王<sup>フナド</sup>で、天武天皇の孫に当り、他に子供のない聖武天皇は特にこの人を愛して、皇太子に選んだ。それは聖武の意志であり、政治に就て親まかせ

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<sup>1059</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 11

<sup>1060</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 11

の孝謙天皇は、まだその頃は皇太子などはどうでもよくて、自身の選り好み、差出口はしなかつた。

恵美押勝（まだその頃は藤原仲麿だつたが、[…]）はその長男が夭折した。そして寡婦が残された。そこで道祖皇太子の従兄弟に当る大炊王を自邸に招じ、この寡婦と結婚させて養つてみた。彼は女帝が皇太子に親しみを持たないことを知つてみたので、それを廃して、大炊王を皇太子につけたいものだと考へてみた。”

*[The Crown Prince of Emperor Kōken was Prince Funado, a grandson of Emperor Tenmu. Emperor Shōmu, who had no other children, was particularly fond of Funado and chose him as the crown prince. As it was the Emperor Shōmu's will, there was no way out of this predicament for Emperor Kōken, who having initially left all political matters to her parents, did not have any particular preferences for a Crown Prince at the time and thus did not make her own choice on the matter.*

*The eldest son of Emi no Oshikatsu (at the time still Fujiwara Nakamaro [...]) died prematurely and left behind a widow. Therefore, Oshikatsu invited Prince Ōi, cousin of Crown Prince Funado, to his own residence, married him off to the widow of his late son and adopted him. Because Nakamaro knew that the female emperor didn't feel any affection for the Crown Prince and wanted to get rid of him, he planned to get Prince Ōi installed as the new Crown Prince.]<sup>1061</sup>*

Thus, Sakaguchi Angō's description of the situation concerning the appointment of Prince Funado as Crown Prince to Emperor Kōken resembles Nihon Ōdai Ichiran's narrative of the same matter. In Hayashi Gahō's work it is directly expressed that “she was dissatisfied with him and didn't want him as her Crown Prince”. On the other hand, Sakaguchi Angō's narrative is more elaborate, as initially it is only pointed out that “there was no way out of this predicament for Emperor Kōken”, thus leaving the assessment of the situation to the reader. Only then does the author add that “the female emperor didn't feel any affection for the Crown Prince and wanted to get rid of him”, thus completely erasing any doubts about Emperor Kōken's feelings toward the Crown Prince chosen by her father.

The second paragraph of that passage introduces Fujiwara no Nakamaro who supported Prince Ōi and “planned to get [him] installed as the new Crown Prince.” According to Sakaguchi, Nakamaro had any reason to believe in the success of his plan thanks to the feelings which Emperor Kōken apparently harboured for him.

“天皇は、恋愛の様式に就て、男を選ぶ美の標準も、年齢の標準も、氣質に就ての標準も、あらゆるモデルを持たなかつた。魂の氣品の規格は最高であつたが、その肉体の思考は、肉体自体にこもる心情は、山だしの女中よりも素朴であつた。

天皇はその最も側近に侍る仲麿が、最も親しい男であるといふだけで、仲麿を見ると、それだけで、とろけるやうに愉しかつた。四十に近い初恋だつた。

母太后の死ぬまでは、それでも自分を抑へてみた。

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<sup>1061</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 12

彼女ほど独創的な美を見出した人はなかつたであらう。彼女には仲麿の全てのものが可愛いかつた。彼女はたゞ自らの好むものを好めばよい。標準もなくモデルもなかつた。たゞ仲麿に見出した全てのものが、可愛くて、いとしくて、仕方がなかつたゞけだつた。

天皇は仲麿を見るたびにえ笑ましくなるので、改名して、<sup>えみのおしかつ</sup>恵美押勝と名のらせた。押勝とは、暴を禁じ、強に勝ち、<sup>ほこ とど</sup>戈を止め、乱を静めたといふ <sup>いさおし</sup>勲の、雄々しい風格の表現だつた。そして大保に任じ、あまつさへ、貨幣鑄造、税物の取り立てに、恵美家の私印を勝手に使用してよろしいといふ政治も恋も区別のない出鱈目な許可を与へたのである。”

*[The emperor didn't have any models of love patterns, nor did she have beauty, age or character standards when choosing a man. Her standards of the dignity of the soul were high, but in matters concerning thoughts and emotions filling up one's body, she was still more naïve than a maid from the countryside.]*

*The Emperor declared Nakamaro, who served as her nearest associate, her most intimate man, and the mere sight of him was enough to melt her heart. It was her first love on the brink of her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*Until her mother's, that is the empress dowager's, demise, she kept those emotions in check.*

*There was probably no other person who found natural beauty in the way she had. For her, everything about Nakamaro was charming. She was free to like what she wanted without standards or models. Practically everything she discovered in Nakamaro was charming and lovely in her eyes.*

*Because of Nakamaro bringing smile to her face every time she saw him, she changed his name to Emi no Oshikatsu. [The name] "Oshikatsu" expressed his heroic personality and [stood for] his meritorious deeds of forbidding violence, powerfully defeating the enemies, stopping military conflicts and calming down disturbances. Then, she appointed him as Taihō and completely disregarding the fact that one should make a distinction between politics and love, gave him permission to use the private seal of the Emi family as he wished when he minted coins and collected taxes.]<sup>1062</sup>*

As it could be seen, Sakaguchi Angō attributes Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rise to power to the feelings which Emperor Kōken supposedly felt toward him. Thus, Sakaguchi's narrative deviates from the official historical sources. For example, Shoku Nihongi reports of rumors about a closer relationship between Retired Emperor Kōken and the monk Dōkyō but mentions absolutely nothing of any closer contact between her and her cousin Nakamaro. As one could see, however, Sakaguchi paints a completely different picture. Apparently Kōken had loved Nakamaro for a long time, but having been strictly controlled by her mother, she had to suppress and hide her feelings. After Kōmyōshi's death, however, the emperor was finally free to show her affection for Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Sakaguchi Angō paints a very romantic picture of the pitiful woman who having been denied all normal human interactions during her preparation to ascend the throne, suddenly became free after the death of her

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<sup>1062</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 12

oppressive mother. She could finally feel and do as she wished, without fear and constraint. Romantic that portrait may be, but it is far from the historical truth. That could be clearly seen in the last paragraph in which Nakamaro's honorable name and his elevation to the position of taiho are attributed to Emperor Kôken. As a matter of fact, at the time when those changes took place, the sitting sovereign was Nakamaro's son-in-law and adopted son Emperor Junnin.<sup>1063</sup> It was actually he who elevated the minister to unheard political heights and lavished honors and privileges on him, and not Emperor Kôken who had been only a Retired Emperor.

Anyway, the feelings of love which Emperor Kôken supposedly felt toward Nakamaro turned out to have been not as deep as Sakaguchi Angô initially described them. According to him, the emperor's relationship with the Buddhist monk Dôkyô after her reascension as Emperor Shôtoku seemed as one between husband and wife.

“女帝は道鏡が皇孫であり、たゞの臣下ではないことを、そのしるしを、天下に明にしたかつた。そして二人の愛情の関係自体も。皇孫だから。そして、愛人なのだから。[...] 名は、そして、人の口は、女帝はすでに意としなかつた。事實はたゞ一つ。道鏡は良人であつた。

道鏡は墮落の悔いを抑へることができてみた。女帝の女体は淫蕩だつた。そして始めて女体を知つた道鏡の肉慾も淫縦いんじゆうだつた。二人は遊びに飽きなかつた。けれども凛冽な魂の気魄と気品の高雅が、いつも道鏡をびつくりさせた。それは夜の閨房の女帝と、昼の女帝の、まったく二つのつながりのない別な姿が彼の目を打つ幻覚だつた。夜の女帝は肉体だつたが、昼の女帝は香気を放つ魂だつた。”

*[The female emperor brought to light evidence of Dôkyô being not a simple retainer but of imperial blood. And also, the romantic relationship between them. Because of his imperial lineage. But also, because he was her lover. [...]] The female emperor didn't care about her reputation or the rumours. The truth was only one. Dôkyô was a good person.*

*Dôkyô was the only one who could suppress her corrupt regrets. Her female body was lewd. And Dôkyô's lust, which first led him to know that woman's body, was also indecent and selfish. The two didn't get tired of their play. However, the vigour of that intense spirit and the dignified chastity amazed Dôkyô every time. The two completely unconnected separate figures, that of the female emperor in her bedchamber at night, and that of the female emperor during the day, were illusion which impressed him. The female emperor at night was all about the flesh, while the female emperor during the day presented a soul that radiated fragrance.]<sup>1064</sup>*

As one could see, the relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô is portrayed as having been a very intimate one. According to Sakaguchi's narrative, the emperor considered Dôkyô the only person who was able to see through her Imperial façade and to understand the woman beneath it. He, on the other hand, was apparently fascinated by the duality in her – during the day she showed the image of the strong ruler, while at night she was a woman with carnal desires as any other. At the same time, however, the sentences “*Her female body was lewd. And Dôkyô's lust, which first led him to know that woman's body, was also indecent and selfish.*” could be interpreted as Shôtoku's assessment of

<sup>1063</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 2.8.25

<sup>1064</sup> Sakaguchi 1947: 22

them being sinful creatures who despite their political positions and their Buddhist devotion, could not escape from the desires of the flesh. Despite the emperor's understanding of their wicked relationship, she had been unable to prevent its progress.

All in all, the said description of the supposedly passionate relation between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô is the culmination of the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan as a naïve woman who was suppressed and controlled by her parents for a big part of her life. Due to her having been denied any normal human desires and interactions in her youth, she could not learn to be simply a woman. Therefore, after the death of her parents, Emperor Kôken began to rediscover that part of her personality, which eventually led her to fall in love with Fujiwara no Nakamaro. Despite the initial description of her strong feelings toward him, that love didn't last long. During her second reign as Emperor Shôtoku, the reader already sees her in a romantic relationship with Dôkyô. It could be assumed that in his book "Dôkyô" Sakaguchi Angô wanted to create a different portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku than the traditional one found in the official histories. At the cost of slightly altering historical facts (for example, Nakamaro's appointment as taiho and the bestowal of the honorary name Emi no Oshikatsu were attributed to Retired Emperor Kôken instead to Emperor Junnin), Sakaguchi seemingly wanted to present the last emperor of Nara Japan simply as a woman. Therefore, he created the impression that while she certainly committed faults during her two reigns, it was not only she who had to take responsibility for them. After all, she was regarded as a mere appendage of her parents who seemed to have not understood that the Imperial position, desired by many but given only to several chosen ones, could be a burden to their daughter. Apparently they also didn't discern the difference between the circumstances of previous female rulers such as Genmei or Genshō and that of their own child. Namely Shōmu's and Kōmyōshi's inability to objectively assess the political factors which led to the enthronement of the other female emperors, and to compare them with the developments which propelled the ascension of Imperial Princess Abe eventually led to her having been denied even the slight possibility to have interactions with men outside of her political duties. From that point of view, it had been no wonder that after the death of her parents, she tried to make up for her lack of social contacts with men. At the same time, her inexperience in matters regarding the male part of society led to various political decisions which could be regarded as mistakes.

#### Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal in „Dôkyô dôji“ (道鏡童子)

Anyway, while in his book "Dôkyô" Sakaguchi Angô successfully portrays Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku as a naïve and oppressed woman, he adopts a slightly different approach in the book "Dôkyô dôji" (道鏡童子; "The boy Dôkyô"). In any case, he doesn't seem to have changed his negative opinion on Emperor Shōmu and Empress Kōmyōshi which was already seen in his previous book on the topic. That much could be assumed upon reading his assessment of the political and financial situation of the state after Emperor Kôken's enthronement.

“彼女は太陽父母の遺産をそっくり身につけたが、この遺産の半分はマイナスであった。父母たる太陽夫妻はあまりにも全能でありすぎたのだ。その全能を現実に行い、大仏をつくったために、国の富を傾けてしまった。”

*[She inherited the legacy of her Sun parents, but half of it was negative. Being omnipotent, her mother and father, revered as the Sun couple, decided to turn their power into something real*

*and visible by erecting the Great Buddha. As a result, however, they ruined the country's wealth.]*<sup>1065</sup>

Sakaguchi Angô offers a rather unorthodox point of view than that found in the official histories. According to his narrative, the erection of the Great Buddha was a rather strenuous task which burdened the budget of the country and made the reign of Emperor Kôken as much difficult. From the official chronicles, one could understand that the project was put on hold several times due to the lack of finances and resources. As some historians even surmised, the reverence for the deity Hachiman was born out of Shômu's need for gold and copper for the huge statue.<sup>1066</sup> However, there is no evidence whatsoever that Emperor Shômu's daughter and successor Emperor Kôken found empty coffers upon her enthronement. In any case, in his second book on the topic, Sakaguchi Angô continues to express rather negative opinion on Emperor Shômu and Empress Komyôshi. While in "Dôkyô" he presents them as insensitive parents who forgot that their daughter was also a person and thus compromised not only her personal development but also her political future, in "Dôkyô dôji" he portrays them as Imperial couple so much absorbed in its own greatness that they strained the budget of the country and thus left their daughter in an extremely difficult situation immediately after her enthronement.

Moreover, the negative legacy left by her parents didn't end only with the complicated financial situation caused by the erection of the Great Buddha at Tôdaiji. According to Sakaguchi Angô, another difficulty was Prince Funado, the Crown Prince chosen by Kôken's father to be her successor and the next ruler of the country.

“父帝の死んだときから、すでに後嗣のゴタゴタが起った。父帝は女帝に位をゆずったとき、皇太子を選んで定めておいた。それは天武の皇孫、どうそおう道祖王である。

父帝が皇太子を定めてやった、ということも、女帝が彼に教育され規定された一生の定めを語っているように思うのである。これが他の女帝の場合なら、某先帝の顔を立てるといような立太子のやり方は不自然ではないが、太陽の子たる聖武天皇と、そのまた太陽の娘たる女帝の場合、太陽は常に自らの血の中から唯一の子孫を定めもし育てもするのが当然であろう。自らを唯一の太陽と信じ、すべての富と勢いはちん朕にありと信じる人が、太陽の孫を他から借りて定めるとはナゼであろう。理由は恐らくただ一つではなからうか。太陽たる女帝は地上に唯一絶対で、同列の男があるべきでないことを彼は知っていた。否、それをテンから信じており、法規に定めるまでもなく思いこんでいた父母たちではなかったらうか。”

*[After the death of the father emperor, there was already been confusion over the successor. When the father emperor handed over the throne to the female Emperor, he chose a Crown Prince to her. He was Prince Funado, the grandson of Emperor Tenmu.*

*The fact that the father emperor was the one who appointed the Crown Prince speaks to the way the female Emperor was educated and defined by him throughout her life. In the case of other female emperors, it would not be unnatural for the crown prince to be chosen in a way that shows respect for a certain predecessor. However, in the case of Emperor Shômu, the son*

<sup>1065</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 4

<sup>1066</sup> See pp. 79/80

*of the Sun, and the female Emperor, the daughter of the Sun, wouldn't it be only natural for the Sun to always choose and raise the only offspring of his own blood? Why would a person who believes in himself as the only Sun and that all wealth and power reside in him borrow the Sun's grandchildren of other [bloodlines] and decide that they would sit on the throne? Wouldn't the reason probably be only one? Because he knew that the female Emperor, the Sun, was the only absolute being on earth, and that there should not be a male equal to her. No, wouldn't it be rather that he and the empress were parents who believed that to be Heaven's will and thus didn't need to stipulate it as law?]*<sup>1067</sup>

As it could be assumed from Sakaguchi's assessment of the situation, Shōmu had been a rather traditional ruler in matters concerning succession. Due to his unwillingness to consider the possibility of choosing a Crown Prince among the descendants of previous emperors, he decided to make his daughter his successor. At the same time, however, he firmly believed in the superior position of the emperor and couldn't accept that a potential husband of hers would hold a rank equal to that of his daughter. Such a take on the situation gives a possible explanation of the reason why Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku remained unmarried. In the society of Nara Japan, there were strict code of conduct and social boundaries which one should and could not surpass. It was a universal truth that the emperor stood at the apex of the political and social ladder, after him followed the ministers, the nobles and so on. Even in the cases when the sovereign had been a man, his empress did not hold an authority equal to his regardless of her descent, her knowledge or her talents. After all, the main responsibility of the empress lay in her giving birth to the next emperor. From that point of view, the reasoning that Shōmu did not allow his daughter to marry, as there ought to have been no male of a rank equal to that of the sovereign is understandable. The next sentence, however, changes the perspective once again. According to it, both Shōmu and his Empress Kōmyōshi regarded the fact that their daughter would remain unmarried as "*Heaven's will*". Taking into account Shōmu's religious devotion, Sakaguchi's reading of the matter could not be far from the truth. At the same time, it remains a mystery how exactly could Shōmu and his empress interpret their daughter's remaining single all her life as something which the Heavens had dictated. It could be speculated that Shōmu and Kōmyōshi simply made an important decision about their daughter's future without even asking her opinion on the matter. Then, in order to prevent her opposition, they presented their own views as "*Heaven's will*". In any case, while that passage addresses the problem of Emperor Kōken having been treated as a child by her parents until the latter's death, it should never be forgotten that Imperial Princess Abe was born and educated in a world strongly influenced by both the Chinese philosophies and code of conduct, and by the Japanese views regarding the ascension of female sovereigns. From her parents' point of view, she seemed as if she was only a temporary solution to a short-lived succession issue. Therefore, they tried to alleviate the downsides of Crown Prince Abe's enthronement as much as possible by preventing the possibility of a succession struggle between a male Imperial descendant and a potential child born to their daughter.

While that strategy seemed to have been successful for a short period of time, it couldn't last forever. As it becomes evident upon reading Sakaguchi's narrative of Emperor Kōken's abdication in favor of Prince Ōi who was later enthroned as Emperor Junnin, the Fujiwara deliberately arranged the encounter between her and the Buddhist monk Dōkyō in order to make her step down from the throne.

„藤原一族の予想した通り、道鏡という人格の現れは女帝の眼界を一挙にぬりかえ、女帝の生き方を変えてしまった。かかる高い人格と深い学識が神ならぬ「人間ども」

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<sup>1067</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 8



にも具そなわっているということは、生きている唯一の神として育てられた女帝には考えられなかったことで、身辺の「人間ども」からはそのカゲだにも知りたかつた驚くべき事実であった。女帝の人生観は一大衝撃をうけ、やがて生き方が一変するに至った。

即ち女帝は位を皇太子にゆずり、自分は仏門にはいった。それは仏法の修業によって到り得た道鏡の人格に驚き、また、敬服したからであつたらう。

[...] こうして深謀遠慮の藤原一族の筋書通りに、彼らは一度も表に立たずに、道鏡を女帝に近づけただけで第一の陰謀を成就した。

次には、彼らの道具としての役割をすました道鏡を片づけなければならない。“

*[According to the expectations of the Fujiwara family, the appearance of [a person with a] personality such as Dôkyô's rewrote the female emperor's world view at once, and completely changed her way of life. The fact that such eminent personality and deep knowledge was possessed by a human being without godly descent was inconceivable to the female Emperor, raised as the one and only living deity. It was an astonishing fact about which the people around her could not know. The female Emperor's view of life was shaken, and her way of life changed completely.*

*Namely, she stepped back in favor of the crown prince and received the Buddhist tonsure. It could be because of the astonishment and great admiration for Dôkyô's personality which he had attained through his Buddhist training.*

*[...] Thus, according to the plot of the far-seeing and deep-designing Fujiwara family, without even standing in the front line once and by merely getting Dôkyô close to the female emperor, they could realize the first [part of their] conspiracy.*

*Next, they should get rid of Dôkyô who fulfilled his role of a tool in their plan.]<sup>1068</sup>*

As it could be seen from that narrative, the Fujiwara seemed to only have waited for the deaths of Shômu and Kômuyôshi in order to try to manipulate the female emperor and to make her abdicate. Interestingly enough, in contrast to the official histories, Sakaguchi Angô dates the beginning of the relationship between Dôkyô and Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku to a much earlier date, apparently even before the emperor's abdication in 758. However, that statement certainly arouses a controversy. According to Shoku Nihongi, the first encounter between the monk and Kôken took place after her abdication, most likely in 761, when Dôkyô supposedly healed her of an unspecified but nonetheless serious disease. Thus, it was rather her decision to reascend the throne and not her abdication that was influenced by the emergence of the monk.

Anyway, while that initial description does not reveal anything in regard to the nature of the relationship between Kôken and Dôkyô, Sakaguchi Angô's next narrative touches on the rumors that the reason for Junnin's dethronement had supposedly been his antipathy toward the Buddhist monk which in turn reflected negatively on his relation with the Retired Emperor.

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<sup>1068</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 12

“道鏡をしりぞける陰謀以前に、淳仁帝が廃せられて淡路へ流され、法体(ほったい)の女帝が重祚した。

淳仁帝が廃されたのは、女帝に向って道鏡を信任なきような言葉をもらしたので、不和になったのだという。俗書では、天皇が女帝と道鏡の肉体的な関係を諷めて女帝の怒りをかったとあるが、そんなことが考えられるであろうか。女帝は自分を選んで帝位に即けてくれた生れながらの現人神である。落語の中の八さん熊さんにしても、なア、おっかア、あのナマグサ坊主とイチャつくのは、やめてくれねえかなア、と諷めた話はあんまり聞かないが、特に長幼の序が人生の万事を律している特殊な社会で、しかも生れながらに唯一絶対の現人神たる上皇に向って、礼なき言葉が発せられるとは思われない。全ての勢いは女神のものなのである。”

*[Prior to the conspiracy which dealt with Dôkyô, Emperor Junnin was deposed and sent to Awaji, and the tonsured female emperor ascended the throne for a second time.*

*It is said, that the reason for Emperor Junnin's dethronement was his remarks full of distrust of Dôkyô uttered in the female Emperor's presence, which stirred frictions between the two. According to popular literature, the Emperor admonished the female Emperor for her physical relationship with Dôkyô, thus stirring the latter's anger against himself, but how is that even possible? The female emperor was a living god who ascended the throne after being chosen by the Heavens. Even though words as "Hey mother, would you stop flirting with that corrupt Buddhist priest?" could be found in rakugo stories, the same could not be said about a society in which the order between young and old stood above all things in life. Moreover, it is unthinkable for such impolite words to be uttered of the Retired Emperor who was revered as the one and only absolute living god all her life. After all, authority had always been in the possession of the female deity.]<sup>1069</sup>*

As it could be seen, however, the author denies the possibility of Junnin's negative sentiments toward Dôkyô and his bad-mouthing of the monk having been the reason for his dethronement. Sakaguchi expresses the opinion that "the Retired Emperor, [...] was revered as the one and only absolute living god all her life. After all, authority had always been in the possession of the female deity.", thus suggesting that she had been respected so much that even the thought of someone offending her seemed impossible. It could even be speculated that Sakaguchi Angô's statement that the "authority had always been in the possession of the female deity" could be interpreted as him putting the authority of the retired female emperor on a higher level than that of the sitting male sovereign simply due to the fact that she was a woman and thus a living goddess. As it was known, Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess and main deity in the pantheon of the indigenous religion, is a female. From that point of view alone, it could be considered that the Retired Emperor held a higher authority than the sitting sovereign thanks to her gender. Thus, the author adds another trait to the portrait of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku painted by him. While in his book "Dôkyô" she was described as a pitiful person suppressed and neglected by her parents, in "Dôkyô dôji" she is portrayed as a woman who finally found her freedom after her parents' death. Especially the last passage describes her as a ruler who

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<sup>1069</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 13

had been highly respected and who supposedly held more authority than her male counterpart courtesy of her having been a woman.

Then, in his next narrative of Junnin's dethronement, Sakaguchi Angô tries to present evidence in support of the theory that Dôkyô had actually been used as a tool in the power game of the Fujiwara family.

“しかし、藤原氏一門が自分に都合のよい天皇をたてるとすれば、己れの仇敵だった押勝のたてた天皇をしりぞけるのは道鏡排斥以前の作業でなければならない。

現天皇をしりぞける工夫はいかに？といえば、確実な方法は一つあるのみである。つまり、女帝に対して、次のように進言し、女帝の心をうごかし、定めることである。即ち、

「道鏡禪師は天智天皇の御孫で、その皇胤<sup>こういん</sup>たる資格に於ては、天武天皇の御孫たる現天皇と同格以下のものではございません。のみならず、その高德と学識は万民の師表と仰がるべき尊い御方で、生れながらに女神たる唯一絶対の上皇につづいては、禪師が人臣最高の御方、この御方ほど女神の皇太子にふさわしく、次の天皇に適格な御方はありますまい」

これに類するササヤキは折にふれて女神の耳に達し、女神の心をうごかすように謀<sup>はか</sup>られ計算されていた筈であろう。”

*[However, if the Fujiwara clan were to put on the throne an emperor favored by them, it would have been necessary to bring down the emperor enthroned by their bitter enemy Oshikatsu. This task took precedence over the removal of Dôkyô.*

*What was the scheme for the resignation of the current emperor? There was only one certain way for it. In other words, it was decided that a certain proposal would be made to the female emperor which [should be thus formulated as] to move her heart. Namely,*

*[The monk Dôkyô is descendant of Emperor Tenji and, speaking of the qualifications of that imperial offspring to succeed the throne, he isn't inferior to the current emperor who is descendant of Emperor Tenmu. Besides, as virtue and knowledge should be revered and respected as model for the whole nation, and as a monk is like a teacher to all subjects, standing only after the retired emperor revered as the one and only absolute female deity all her life, there is no other person more suitable to be crown prince to the female deity and more qualified to be the next emperor.]*

*It seems that a vile calculation was made according to which such rumors would reach the female emperor's ears by every opportunity and thus move her heart.]<sup>1070</sup>*

That passage not only raises speculations that the Fujiwara influenced the dethronement of Emperor Junnin but also that Fujiwara no Nakamaro had been hated by his own family. Speaking of the latter, the same conclusions could be made upon reading the Nihon Ôdai Ichiran chronicle from the 5<sup>th</sup> month

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<sup>1070</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 14

of 756 in which it is said that “*Toyonari, elder brother of Nakamaro, was only Dainagon; and as the latter was elevated to such a high office because of the Emperor’s favor toward him, Toyonari developed an irreconcilable hatred toward his brother.*”<sup>1071</sup> Eventually, Toyonari did not reveal the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro, and his infuriated brother Nakamaro had him punished by sending him into exile. At the same time, the Shoku Nihongi edict from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) revealed that “*Thus he deceived and slandered his elder brother Toyonari so that for the last few years Toyonari has been deprived of rank.*”<sup>1072</sup> All things considered, it could be assumed that there certainly had been animosity between Fujiwara no Nakamaro and his older brother Toyonari. From that point of view, it could be easily speculated that other members of the family also harboured negative sentiments toward Nakamaro. Thus, Sakaguchi Angô’s depiction of the events could not be far from the actual historical truth. If there truly had been people in the family who despised Nakamaro and wanted to see his fall from grace, the swiftest method to do so would have been to take care of his backing, that is Emperor Junnin, who after his enthronement, had practically become a marionette in the hands of his Prime Minister.

What is more interesting, however, is the theory that the Fujiwara instigated the Dôkyô Incident in order to bring down both Emperor Junnin and Nakamaro. To support his claim, Sakaguchi Angô also expresses a hypothesis, the roots of which could be found in Sendai Kuji Hongi (Kujiki) according to which the Yuge clan to which Dôkyô also belonged had been connected with the Mononobe family.<sup>1073</sup> The author tries to support his claims through a narrative of the potential blood relationship between Dôkyô and Emperor Tenji.

“道鏡は天智天皇の孫であった。

彼の敵手の手になった正史には道鏡を天智の孫と書いてないのは当然だが、他の史料によると天智の孫たることは疑えないようである。しかし正史には大臣の子孫とある。<sup>おおみ</sup>彼の生地、河内の弓削はたしかに物部氏の領地であった。物部氏は正史には大連とあり、大臣は蘇我氏に限るが、この蘇我氏の中には、物部氏滅亡後その遺産をそっくりもらって物部大臣と称した蘇我氏の一人が実在しているのである。つまり蘇我と物部という最高の二氏族のアイノコの物部大臣である。

物部大連の遺産はそっくり物部大臣の物となった筈だから、物部の子孫が大臣の子孫でもフシギはない。この物部大臣の娘の一人が、天智天皇の御子施基皇子に嫁して、道鏡が生れたのだらうというのは喜田博士の説であるが、私もそのへんが手ごろの説だらうと思う。父系から云うと天智の孫だが、母系で云うと大臣の子孫で、どっちの史料も正しいという都合のよい結果になる。”

*[Dôkyô was grandchild of Emperor Tenji.]*

<sup>1071</sup> See Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

<sup>1072</sup> See Shoku Nihongi, transl. by Bender (ii) 2018: 45

<sup>1073</sup> See 先代旧事本紀 [Sendai Kuji Hongi], Vol. 5, 天孫本紀 [Tenson hongi]

*It is only natural that he wasn't described as Tenji's grandchild in the national histories compiled by his enemies, but, according to other historical records, he was doubtlessly Tenji's grandchild. However, according to the national histories, he was a grandchild of an Ô-mi.*

*His birthplace, Yuge in the province Kawachi, was most certainly territory of the Mononobe clan. According to national history, the Mononobe were a Ô-muraji clan, whereas the Soga were the biggest Ô-mi clan, but after Mononobe's downfall, there was a single member of the Soga clan who received all the Mononobe's legacy and called himself Mononobe Ô-mi. In other words, there was a Mononobe Ô-mi who was the result of the crossbreeding of Soga and Mononobe, the two most powerful clans.*

*As the legacy of the Mononobe Ô-muraji was completely assimilated and thus became Mononobe Ô-mi, there should be nothing mysterious that the grandchild of Mononobe would also be a grandchild of an Ô-mi. According to the theory of Professor Kida, one of the daughters of that Mononobe Ô-mi later married Emperor Tenji's son Prince Shiki and gave birth to Dôkyô, and I also think that such a theory is a very plausible one. In terms of paternal lineage, he was a grandchild of Tenji, but on his mother's side, he was also a grandchild of an Ô-mi, which creates a result convenient for all historical sources.]<sup>1074</sup>*

While Sendai Kuji Hongi from the 7<sup>th</sup> century is the only historical source according to which Dôkyô's lineage could be traced back to the Mononobe clan, it seems that Sakaguchi Angô accepted the possibility of the monk having a noble, even Imperial, blood coursing through his veins. From that point of view, the author's interpretation that the Fujiwara family, in their animosity toward Nakamaro, wanted to use Dôkyô as a weapon against their relative and Emperor Junnin seems plausible. As it could be seen, Sakaguchi paints a picture in which the Fujiwara family supposedly was dissatisfied with the enthronement of Emperor Kôken because she didn't meet their expectations. Therefore, they crafted a strategy to install an emperor who would satisfy their criteria. Their plan, however, seemed to have been obstructed by the fact that Kôken had already appointed Fujiwara no Nakamaro's favorite, Prince Ôi, as her Crown Prince. Therefore, the Fujiwara family decided to proceed step by step by first making the female emperor abdicate. For that purpose, they introduced her to Dôkyô. He was able to win Kôken's respect to the point that she decided to step down in favor of Prince Ôi who was enthroned as Emperor Junnin. Then, the Fujiwara once more utilized the Buddhist monk in order to bring down both Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Junnin. According to Sakaguchi's reading of the matter, it was apparently enough for Kôken to hear the rumour that Dôkyô could actually be a descendant of Emperor Tenji for her to decide to reascend the throne and to appoint the monk as her successor. Thus, both Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Junnin seemed out of the picture. Then, the Fujiwara family utilized the false oracle delivered by Suge no Asomaro in order to remove Dôkyô and thus to create themselves the opportunity to choose the future emperor who would suit their own political views.

“そこで藤原氏一族の陰謀はその仕上げにかかるのである。藤原氏の密令をうけた九州の神司の習宣のアソマロという者が、宇佐八幡の神託と称し、道鏡を天皇の位に即けたなら天下平らならん、と奏上した。

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<sup>1074</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 11

こうして女帝や道鏡の心を誘っておいて、次に和氣清麻呂と法均の姉弟を宇佐八幡へ伺いにたてて日本は昔から君神の位が定まっている。道鏡のような無道な者は亡すべし、という予定の神託を復奏した。

実に精妙な、手のこんだ筋書であったにも拘らず、童貞童心の女帝の叡智の閃きは正しい実相を感じ当て、この陰謀はまったく成功しなかった。“

*[Thereupon, the Fujiwara family's conspiracy came to its end. A person named Suge no Asomaro, who was in charge of the Shintô priests in Kyûshû, received orders from the Fujiwara family in secret, and reported to the emperor the oracle of the deity Hachiman according to which if Dôkyô succeeded to the imperial throne, peace will reign across the country.*

*After tempting the hearts of the female emperor and Dôkyô in this way, Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister Hôkin were urged by the sovereign to go to Usa Hachiman in order to ask the deity about his stance on matters on which the deities had already said their final word since ages. As expected, the oracle reported to the emperor said that a wicked person such as Dôkyô must die.*

*In spite of the elaborate and complex plot, the wisdom inside the female emperor's pure heart perceived the true state of affairs, and the plot did not succeed.]<sup>1075</sup>*

As it could be seen from that passage, the plan of the Fujiwara seemed to have reached its culmination with the Dôkyô Incident. Apparently Sakaguchi attributes such a crucial historical event not to the person who would have profited the most from it but rather to the Fujiwara family. Fully utilizing the lack of historical evidence of Dôkyô's direct involvement in Hachiman's first oracle, the author gives a rather free interpretation of history. To be precise, however, such free reading would have been impossible, had there been sufficient information in the official histories. Unfortunately, however, that is not the case. For example, the Shoku Nihongi chronicle consists of a short report and Emperor Shôtoku's edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769). Anyway, despite his untraditional interpretation of the incident, the author remains true to his intention to present Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku in a rather good light. He points out that the “*the wisdom inside the female emperor's pure heart perceived the true state of affairs, and the plot did not succeed*”, and thus portrays the last female ruler of Nara Japan as a rather perceptive person who was able to reveal such a complex plot as an one supposedly concocted by the Fujiwara family.

Thus, with the narrative and interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident, the development of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal in Sakaguchi Angô's books “Dôkyô” and “Dôkyô dôji” comes to an end. In the first book she is presented as a naïve woman oppressed by her parents to the point that her life consisted of nothing more than her political duties which in turn were also more or less controlled by Shômu and Empress Komyôshi. Seemingly dissatisfied with the role which her parents played in her life, she tried to break free from the shackles put on her. That much could be assumed from her decision to depose the Crown Prince chosen by her father to become her successor. Anyway, even if she wanted to take control over her own life, the restrictions put on Emperor Kôken since her early childhood left their mark on her personality. She was easily influenced by other people, most especially men, with whom she wouldn't know how to interact. She saw love there where it did actually not exist (apparently the case with Fujiwara no Nakamaro), which led her to commit political mistakes. That

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<sup>1075</sup> Sakaguchi 1988: 15

rather harsh portrayal takes a turn for the better in Sakaguchi Angô's second book "Dôkyô dôji". In it, the last female emperor of Nara Japan is described as a woman who had to overcome many challenges in her political career due to the carelessness of her own parents. Firstly, the erection of the Great Buddha at Tôdaiji left the country in a most strained financial situation – a hard task to overcome for an inexperienced ruler. It is once more emphasized that Shômu's and Kômyôshi's views prevented their daughter from getting married, which influenced her life in a rather negative way. Then, after the death of her parents, the Fujiwara decided to intervene and to put a ruler to their own liking on the throne. They supposedly arranged the encounter between Kôken and Dôkyô, thus planning to remove both Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Emperor Junnin from the political picture. Especially in the case of Emperor Junnin's dethronement, it is pointed out that the Retired Emperor held more authority than the sitting sovereign courtesy of her gender. It is well known that Amaterasu, the deity which stands at the apex of the Shintôist pantheon, is a female. In that train of thought, even a retired female ruler would have supposedly held more authority than a male sitting sovereign. Fujiwara's plan was almost successfully completed after they instigated the Dôkyô Incident in an attempt to remove both the Buddhist monk and Emperor Shôtoku from the political scene. To their disappointment, however, she had been wise enough to prevent their success. Thus, it could be seen that Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal in "Dôkyô dôji" underwent a massive development. She is presented as a wise ruler who most likely was aware of the Fujiwara's plot since the beginning, but went with the flow in order to see how far they would go in their desire for power. Then, she crushed their hopes once and for all, thus demonstrating her wisdom. As one could see, the weak woman portrayed in "Dôkyô" was replaced with the strong and wise ruler who was able to overcome many obstacles during her reign.

### Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's two reigns through the prism of modern historiography

As it could be seen from the analysis of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's portrayal throughout the centuries, the image of the last female ruler of Nara Japan fluctuated between that of a naïve woman and that of a strong and cunning sovereign. As in all things in life, however, the truth stands somewhere in-between. It was true that as a woman in a man's world, Kôken/Shôtoku was always discriminated against by the male courtiers who regarded her simply as a throneholder and could not accept the idea that a female ruler would be able to stand on par with her male counterparts<sup>1076</sup>, but that reality could not depreciate her own talents and capabilities. Controversial as her political decisions had been – beginning with her handling of the Tachibana no Naramaro's conspiracy, going through her clash with Emperor Junnin and Fujiwara no Nakamaro, and coming to the Buddhist monk Dôkyô and his role in her life and at her court during her second reign, the sole fact that she had been a ruler against whom the nobles tried to rebel<sup>1077</sup> serves to prove that Kôken/Shôtoku was in no way a weak woman who could be easily influenced by the opinions of her male courtiers. On the other hand, namely those political decisions of hers contributed to the controversial portrayal reflected in the historical sources and novels. The lack of thorough information in the official histories leaves room for speculation in cases such as the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro<sup>1078</sup>, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's first encounter with Dôkyô<sup>1079</sup> and their relationship thereafter, or the Dôkyô Incident<sup>1080</sup>. As a result, it could be said

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<sup>1076</sup> See Shoku Nihongi, Tenpyô Hôji 1.7.4

<sup>1077</sup> Tachibana no Naramaro in 757 and Fujiwara no Nakamaro in 764.

<sup>1078</sup> Here, the lack of any reliable information about the punishment enacted on Naramaro should be noted. (pp. 173/174)

<sup>1079</sup> The nature of Retired Emperor Kôken's disease at the time remained unclear. (pp. 138)

<sup>1080</sup> The emperor's attitude during the whole Incident leaves room for speculation. (pp. 152 and pp. 214/222)

that the Western, or even the modern Japanese, historical research on the life and the reigns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan fell victim to the abovementioned lack of facts.

#### Joan R. Piggott's „untraditional“ view

As Joan R. Piggott explains in her essay “The last classical sovereign. Kōken-Shōtoku Tennō”,

“Historians of Japan writing in English – including James Murdoch, George Sansom, and John Whitney Hall – have argued that Kōken-Shōtoku Tennō discredited female rulership by her “scandalous” partnership with the monk Dōkyō, who is generally portrayed as plotting to seize throne and state. The fact is, however, that such scenarios ignore the crisis that faced Kōken-Shōtoku’s reign as a female Heavenly Sovereign (tennō).”<sup>1081</sup>

Piggott further elaborates on her last sentence. According to her,

“Eighth-century Japanese attempts to institutionalize the Chinese practice of royal patrilineal succession resulted in female sovereignty, but at the same time deepening acculturation of Sinic ideals of male rulership was steadily delegitimizing female monarchs.”<sup>1082</sup>

That observation seemed to have been proved right in the case of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Piggott argues that both the first and the second reign of Kōken/Shōtoku were strongly marked by the Confucian ideas and practices. The author explains that in a society so strongly navigated by Confucianism and the Ritsuryō codes even the appointment of a woman to the position of Crown Prince could be considered unique because:

“...the unmarried crown princess was unlikely to produce an heir: according to the code she could marry only a prince, after which according to the patrilineal assumptions of codal law, her offspring would represent her husband’s line rather than her father’s.”<sup>1083</sup>

Even under such circumstances, however, Imperial Princess Abe had been preferred to her half brother Prince Asaka for the position of an heir to the throne. Piggott explains that the Go-sechi dance performed by Crown Prince Abe in the presence of Retired Emperor Genshō and her father Emperor Shōmu in 742 was most likely instigated by her tutor Kibi no Makibi, who was “*convinced of the centrality of court ritual at the Tang court.*”<sup>1084</sup>

“Furthermore, by dancing before a pair of co-rulers, one female and one male, Abe also signaled that as her father’s filial daughter she would serve as her soon-to-retire father’s partner in gender-paired rulership, just as had countless female deities and chieftains whose stories filled court myth histories like the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki.”<sup>1085</sup>

As it could be seen from Piggott’s interpretation of the Go-sechi dance, she attributes Crown Prince Abe’s performance to the latter’s wish to indicate that she would form a ruling pair with her father and thus follow the example set by the mythical deities from the Japanese mytho-histories Kojiki and Nihonshoki. From that point of view, Shōmu’s intention to defend the decision to appoint his daughter as his heir could be interpreted in a completely different way.

Then, the important episode of Prince Funado’s deposition is described by Piggott as “*particularly striking because, when compared with the proclamations of 749, they evidence marked changes in the*

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<sup>1081</sup> Piggott 2003: 47

<sup>1082</sup> Piggott 2003: 47

<sup>1083</sup> Piggott 2003: 54

<sup>1084</sup> Piggott 2003: 54

<sup>1085</sup> Piggott 2003: 54



*charter of Heavenly Sovereignty, especially in their emphasis on the classical “Confucian” virtues of filiality and propriety.”*<sup>1086</sup> The same thing was already discussed during the analysis of Nihon Ôdai Ichiran’s chronicle where Emperor Kôken’s decision to remove Funado from his position has been attributed to her having been “*dissatisfied with him*” and to her opinion that she “*didn’t want him as her Crown Prince*”.

Joan Piggott then continues with a rather unusual reading of Kôken’s abdication in favor of Crown Prince Ôi.

“Kôken’s critics responded violently to her new claims and dismissal of Prince Funado in the seventh month of 757. Tachibana Naramaro, son of the retired prime minister Tachibana Moroe, led a stunning coup that reportedly involved nearly four hundred fifty individuals, a huge percentage of court society. Had the main protector of both Kôken and Queen Kômyô, Fujiwara Nakamaro, not succeeded in marshaling the necessary military manpower, the plotters would have won the day. In the wake of the grisly violence that led to not a few deaths by execution, Kôken Tennô passed her throne to her newly chosen heir, Prince Ôi, another of Temmu’s grandsons, in 758.”<sup>1087</sup>

Apparently the reason for Kôken’s abdication had not been a pressure supposedly exerted by Fujiwara no Nakamaro but rather the bloodshed which followed the exposure of the plot of Tachibana no Naramaro. Thus, Kôken is compared with Emperor Kôgyoku who stepped down from her position as a result of Soga no Iruka’s assassination. Such a comparison, however, would not be precise because Emperor Kôgyoku/Saimei had clearly been one of the female rulers who could be described as throneholders, while Kôken/Shôtoku could be considered anything else than a throneholder.

Then, Piggott presents an interesting interpretation of Retired Emperor Kôken’s edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) with which she practically excluded Emperor Junnin from the government by stating that she would “*carry out the fundamental duties of the great things of state, rewards and punishments.*”<sup>1088</sup> According to the author, the Retired Emperor borrowed the idea of splitting the power of the monarchy from the Tang emperor Ruizong.

“...in 712 the Tang emperor Ruizong passed his throne to his heir, Xuanzong, after dividing responsibility for “*matters great and small*” between them. Kibi Makibi brought texts on the early history of the Tang dynasty back with him in 735, and some report of that event may well have been included.”<sup>1089</sup>

As Piggott explains, even the Retired Emperor’s edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) seemed to have been heavily influenced by an already established Chinese practice. Having learnt the art of government from Kibi no Makibi and her own father Emperor Shômu, she seemed to have considered herself in a higher position than the actual sitting sovereign. As she had showed respect and filial piety toward her father even after his abdication, she expected the same from her successor. In the moment when Junnin failed to meet her expectations, she felt herself free to dismiss him.

Joan Piggott also gives a rather different reading of the relationship between Dôkyô and Emperor Shôtoku. According to her,

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<sup>1086</sup> Piggott 2003: 56

<sup>1087</sup> Piggott 2003: 57

<sup>1088</sup> Bender 2003: 44

<sup>1089</sup> Piggott 2003: 58

“After retaking the throne in 764, Shôtoku Tennô reorganized her court to establish two lines of command, one to be overseen by her Council of State and one to be directed by her monk-lieutenant, Dôkyô. In other words, those responsible for both non-Buddhist (outer) affairs and Buddhist (inner) affairs were formally integrated at her court for the first time. [...] Although Japanese historians have revised the earlier common wisdom that Dôkyô was the real ruler in Kôken-Shôtoku’s second term, the English historiography has continued to ignore Shôtoku’s agenda in presiding over her court. I view Dôkyô as Shôtoku’s primary lieutenant, in a role replicating that occupied by Nakamaro earlier, although the monk Dôkyô was much more dependent on his monarch than Fujiwara Nakamaro, scion of a ministerial family, had been. Kôken-Shôtoku’s oral edicts portray a strong personality insistent on full exercise of her sovereign will. She was not a passive woman. The daughter of Shômu and Queen Kômyô was a willful ruler who would not tolerate lese majeste.”<sup>1090</sup>

Thus, Piggott defends the opinion that Kôken/Shôtoku was in no way a weak woman who entirely depended on Dôkyô. On the contrary, she had been a strong and decisive ruler who took political decisions without having to rely on others.

In that train of thought, Piggott argues that neither the Buddhist monk nor Emperor Shôtoku could have instigated the infamous Dôkyô Incident. The author defends the opinion that the event had been a plot, the target of which had been the monk minister, probably also with the purpose of putting an end to the Tenmu line’s hold on the throne.

“Some historians have posited that Shôtoku Tennô herself concocted the oracle scenario to provide herself with a desperately needed heir, but that seems doubtful both in light of her dispatch of Wake to Kyûshû and because she of all persons would have known the importance of Sun-line descent as the basic qualification for becoming tennô. It has always seemed more plausible to me that Dôkyô himself was the target of a plot designed to shake the monarch’s faith in him. There were numerous courtiers and rival monks eager to be rid of Dôkyô’s influence, his domination of the Prelates Office and Nara temples and his unceasing spending on religious rites and projects. High on the list of Dôkyô’s rivals must have been Northern Fujiwara Nagate, then sitting leader of the Council of State.

If Dôkyô was the target the plot failed, perhaps because Shôtoku suspected the plan. The affair was nonetheless the beginning of Shôtoku Tennô’s end and the end of Temmu-line rulership as well.”<sup>1091</sup>

In that aspect, Joan Piggott fully supports the view that courtiers and monks alike had enough reasons to hate Dôkyô and to want to sabotage him. Similar to Sakaguchi Angô, Piggott doesn’t exclude the possibility that the Fujiwara were the main strategists behind the whole oracle episode. According to her, although the plot was eventually revealed by Emperor Shôtoku herself, it undeniably tarnished her reputation and thus made the continuation of the Tenmu line almost impossible.

As it could be seen, Joan Piggott, a Western author with deep interest in Japanese history, paints a rather positive picture of the last female emperor of Nara Japan. She doesn’t see her as a throneholder but rather as a strong and independent ruler who didn’t hesitate to make difficult political decisions when such were needed. The only slightly negative aspect of her overall portrayal is the episode of her abdication on which Piggott comments that Kôken decided to step down as a result of the bloodshed that followed the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro, thus comparing her with another female ruler,

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<sup>1090</sup> Piggott 2003: 60, 62

<sup>1091</sup> Piggott 2003: 64

Emperor Kôgyoku/Saimei. All in all, however, Joan Piggott supports the untraditional opinion that Kôken/Shôtoku was a ruler whose personality and political career were strongly influenced, even navigated, by the Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. The Japanese society's adherence to the Ritsuryô codes and the imported Confucian teachings led to the establishment of the notion of a male-dominated world in which the women were considered inferior to the men. From that point of view, the appointment of Imperial Princess Abe as a Crown Prince was seen as an anomaly, something which defied the principles of society. According to Piggott, the break with Confucian teachings and Ritsuryô codes combined with the turbulent events during the two reigns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan resulted in her rather negative portrayal in some sources, Western also among them.

“Although these values characterizing the patriarchal family paradigm may have had less impact on general kinship practices, in the realm of kingship female rulers were delegitimized. Second, the historical experience of Kôken-Shôtoku's two unstable reigns led court leaders to the conclusion that female succession resulted in problems for court and throne that were best avoided.”<sup>1092</sup>

Apparently these views are also the reason for the wrong assumption that Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was responsible for the end of female sovereignty. In fact, however, the last female ruler of Nara Japan fell victim to the male-dominated society in which she lived.

#### Ulrich Pauly's view

The abovementioned negative tendency to attribute the end of female sovereignty to the supposed love relationship between Dôkyô and Emperor Shôtoku could be seen in Ulrich Pauly's essay “Japanische Herscherinnen.” According to his reading of the situation,

“Kôkens Beziehung zu Dôkyô hatte schon 762 begonnen, als er sie angeblich von einer Krankheit geheilt hatte. Buddhistisch was Dôkyô kein großes Licht. Er hatte daher keinen besonderen Ruf in buddhistischen Kreisen, rühmte sich aber durch esoterische Riten erlangter geheimnisvoller Heilkräfte, war politisch ehrgeizig and scheint – wenn man einem Volkslied der Zeit and anderen Quellen glauben will – die unverheiratete Kaiserin auch in seiner Eigenschaft als Liebhaber auf dem gemeinsamen Kopfkissen voll und ganz überzeugt zu haben.”<sup>1093</sup>

As it could be seen, Pauly is highly critical of the relationship between Dôkyô and Kôken/Shôtoku. In his narrative, however, he makes several controversial statements. Firstly, he argues that Dôkyô was politically ambitious, something which could not be proved by the official histories. As it was already discussed, Dôkyô could not, or rather was not allowed to, establish a firm political backing consisting of his own family. Even the elevation of his brother Kiyohito to different political positions could be considered as Shôtoku's way to counterbalance the influence of the Fujiwara rather than as her willingly giving him political power. The same seemed to have been the situation with Dôkyô. Even when he was already King of the Law (Hô-ô) and supposedly stood above the Council of State, his actions were more or less restricted by the Minister of the Right and the Minister of the Left. The former position was occupied by Fujiwara no Nagate who was a part of the most powerful noble family in the country, while the latter belonged to Kibi no Makibi, the respected teacher of the emperor. Secondly, it seems obvious that Pauly relied on setsuwa stories for the portrayal of the relationship between Dôkyô and Emperor Shôtoku (that much could be concluded upon seeing that he, similar to Nihon ryôiki's author monk Kyôkai used the phrase “shared a pillow”). As it was already explained,

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<sup>1092</sup> Piggott 2003: 65

<sup>1093</sup> Pauly 2007: 24

however, the setsuwa stories' main objective was not historical accuracy but rather entertainment and moral teachings. The Buddhist monks who acted as the main contributors to the setsuwa genre often changed the historical facts or even created "historical truths" about political personalities in order to bring them closer to the common people, to point out their moral failings and to use their mistakes as a way to educate the masses. From that point of view, to rely only on setsuwa stories as a source for the historical description of a politically engaged person does not seem to be the best option in matters regarding accuracy and objectivity.

Then, the negative portrayal of Emperor Shôtoku and her relationship with Dôkyô goes on:

"Shôtoku war ihm sogar so hörig, daß sie ihn 765 gegen alle Widerstände zum Priesterlichen Großkanzler (dajô daijin zenshi) ernannte, was der gesamte Hof als Affront empfand, weil Dôkyô keiner der großen Adelssippen der Zeit angehörte. 769 ging Kaiserin Shôtoku dann sogar so weit, Dôkyô aus buddhistischer Frömmigkeit und/oder sexueller Hörigkeit den nur Kaisern vorbehaltenen Titel eines buddhistischen Mönchkaisers (hôm) zu verleihen."<sup>1094</sup>

As it could be seen, Pauly constantly reminds the reader of the supposedly sexual nature of the relationship between Dôkyô and Shôtoku. Thus, both the monk's appointment as *dajô daijin zenshi* and King of Law (*Hôm*) are explained as a fruit of Shôtoku's sexual dependence on him. While in the previous passage, it could be assumed that the author used setsuwa stories (*Nihon ryôiki*, in particular) as the source of his opinion that Shôtoku and Dôkyô shared a pillow in her bedchamber, the same could not be said about the explanation of the monk's rise to power. It could be assumed that Ulrich Pauly used the setsuwa story as a basis to create his own reading of the matter, thus creating a whole new version of the historical truth. Nevertheless, the negative portrayal of Emperor Shôtoku reaches its peak in the last passage of the narrative where one reads that

"Die Affäre um Shôtoku und Dôkyô hat wahrscheinlich nicht nur dazu geführt, daß die Qualifikation einer Frau, als Herrscherin den Thron zu besteigen, in Japan in der Folge für Jahrhunderte angezweifelt wurde, sie war auch einer der Gründe, die 784 zur Verlegung der Hauptstadt von Heijô-kyô (Nara) nach Nagaoka und 794 nach Heian-kyô (Kyôto) führte, mit der man dem als übermächtig empfundenen Einfluß der buddhistischen Kreise im Gebiet Heijô-kyôs (Naras) entgegen wollte."<sup>1095</sup>

As it could be seen, not only does Ulrich Pauly explain the end of female sovereignty with the supposed love relationship between Dôkyô and Shôtoku but he also attributes the change of the capital first to Nagaoka and then to Heian-kyô to exactly the same reason. While it was true that Emperor Kanmu wanted to change his seat of power, that decision could not be connected with the relationship between Dôkyô and Shôtoku. Firstly, the change of the capital was an old practice in the Imperial House, as in earlier times it was believed that the soul of the previous ruler would remain in his seat of power and would thus bring bad luck to the new ruler. In later times (especially after the reign of Emperor Tenmu), the capital was often considered a physical expression of the authority of the sovereign. It symbolized his power and the stability of his government. From that point of view, Kanmu's decision to change the capital could be interpreted as both his intention to distance himself from the "bad luck" associated with Heijô-kyô since it had been a residence of several emperors before him, and as a demonstration of the break with the Tenmu line of succession. Of course, the support which Dôkyô enjoyed during the reign of Emperor Shôtoku also contributed to the strengthening of the Buddhist circles in the old capital, but one could not blame a single ruler for an event which was in development

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<sup>1094</sup> Pauly 2007: 24

<sup>1095</sup> Pauly 2007: 25

at least since the reign of Emperor Shōmu. Ulrich Pauly, however, subtly skips out on these facts and attributes the end result to the supposed love relationship between the Buddhist monk and the last female ruler of Nara Japan. In that case it could not even be argued that the author's opinion was influenced by the ideas of patrilineality in both society and politics typical of ancient Japan which were supposedly jeopardized by Kōken/Shōtoku's ascension to the throne. The negative portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan seems to be rooted in the usage of setsuwa stories as a source of historical knowledge. The conclusions made upon reading the Nihon ryōiki's story were further developed by Pauly, who then created his own version of the historical truth.

### Takinami Sadako's narrative of the historical facts

Takinami Sadako's book "Kōken tennō: the last female emperor" (最後の女帝孝謙天皇; Saigo no jotei Kōken tennō) is unique in many aspects. The author uses both traditional sources such as Shoku Nihongi or Nihon kōki, and not so popular sources such as Sukuyō Senmonshō<sup>1096</sup> (宿曜占文抄; a 27-page document containing astrological lore), the oldest Japanese medical text Ishinpō<sup>1097</sup> (醫心方) or the encyclopedia Wamyō ruijūshō<sup>1098</sup> (倭名類聚抄) in order to present her version of the historical narrative. Similar to some traditional sources, Takinami praises Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku's political aptness and strong character, but at the same time she also expresses some untraditional views on certain episodes in the life and reign(s) of the last female ruler of Nara Japan that had remained more or less unresolved due to the lack of historical evidence. For example, the author supports the notion that there had actually been love between Shōtoku and Dōkyō, or that the Dōkyō Incident, though a conspiracy organised by the monk's political enemies, had been further propelled by his own brother Kiyohito who strived to support his older brother<sup>1099</sup> but only managed to ruin his political career and future instead. All in all, Takinami Sadako's book could be considered a rather accurate modern portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan.

Similar to other thorough narratives of the life and two reigns of Kōken/Shōtoku, Takinami also begins with short portrayal of the political situation during the reign of her father Emperor Shōmu. Of course, the author also touches on the topic "Imperial succession" and the problems which came about after the death of Prince Motoi, the son born to Shōmu by his Fujiwara empress Kōmyōshi. According to Takinami, after the prince's death in 728, the emperor, still hoping for the birth of another male child between him and Kōmyōshi, was reluctant to appoint a successor. After 10 years of futile hopes, Shōmu eventually had to accept the idea that Imperial Princess Abe would remain his only living child by his empress. As a result, he was forced to choose an heir from among his remaining children. Among them, Imperial Princess Abe, his daughter from Kōmyōshi, and Prince Asaka, his son from his second wife Agatainukai no Hirotoji, were considered the main candidates. Takinami mentions an important point which supposedly played a crucial role in the choice of Imperial Princess Abe as Shōmu's successor:

“③ 阿倍内親王に関して。女子であっても嫡系であり、安積よりも年長であった（この時二一歳）。嫡系相承にこだわる聖武にとって、この阿倍をさし置いて、他に皇位継承者を求めることは考えられなかったし、それは光明子も同様であった。”

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<sup>1096</sup> See Takinami 1998: 138

<sup>1097</sup> See Takinami 1998: 62

<sup>1098</sup> See Takinami 1998: 62

<sup>1099</sup> See Takinami 1998: 184

*[3] Regarding Imperial Princess Abe. Even though she was a female, as a child born to his Empress, she belonged to the direct line of succession and was also older than Asaka (at the time, 21 years old). Shōmu, who was fixated on a direct-line succession, could not imagine disregarding Abe in favor of another candidate for the throne. The same was also true of Kōmyōshi.]*<sup>1100</sup>

As it could be seen, it seems that Emperor Shōmu didn't consider Imperial Princess Abe as simply a throneholder, but rather as a plausible solution to a succession problem which otherwise could have put an end to the Tenmu line of succession. According to Takinami, he was "fixated" on the idea of a succession of the direct line, that is successors born between the emperor and his empress. From that point of view, it seems that Imperial Princess Abe was the main candidate for the throne ever since Shōmu accepted the fact that there would be no other male children born between him and Kōmyōshi.

Then, Takinami Sadako addresses the fact that Imperial Princess Abe turned out to have been the only female Crown Prince in the history of the Imperial House of Japan.

“ところで阿倍の立太子は少なくとも二つの点において異例であった。

一つは、これまでの皇太子はすべて男子であったのに対して、はじめて女性皇太子であったことである。女性の皇太子は、後にも先にも阿倍ただ一人である。

二つは、女帝になる上で、立太子は要件でなかったにもかかわらず、阿倍は立太子した唯一の例であったことである。

むろんこの二つは表裏の関係にあるが、なぜその異例の立太子が行われたのか。元明や元正の例を持ち出すまでもなく、女帝となるのに皇太子となる必要はなかったから、聖武がその気になれば阿倍をただちに即位させることができた。しかし当然のことながら、この方策は聖武自身の即位あつてのもので、それと引きかえの阿倍の即位は、なすべき仕事を残していた聖武にとっては時期尚早であった（ちなみに聖武の譲位はこれから一一年後）。”

*[The decision to appoint Abe to the position of Crown Prince was unusual in at least two respects.*

*Firstly, she was the first female crown prince, whereas all previous crown princes had been male. Abe was the only female Crown Prince in history, as there were no similar cases before and after her appointment to the position.*

*Secondly, even though it was not a requirement for a female to be appointed as Crown Prince in order to ascend the throne, Abe turned out to have been the only exception to that unwritten rule.*

*Of course, these two points could be regarded as two sides of the same coin, but why did such an unusual event such as the appointment of female crown prince actually happen? As it could be seen from the examples of Genmei and Genshō, it was not necessary for a woman to be appointed as crown prince in order to be enthroned as a female ruler, so Shōmu could have let*

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<sup>1100</sup> Takinami 1998: 49

*Abe directly ascend to the throne if he wanted to do so. However, of course, this measure was only possible if Shōmu himself stepped down in favor of Abe. At the time, however, he still had things which required his attention as the sitting sovereign (in fact, Shōmu abdicated 11 years later).]*<sup>1101</sup>

As it could be seen, Takinami regards the appointment of Imperial Princess Abe as a Crown Prince as something unique which actually had not been necessary for her ascension. As the author herself assumes, however, the designation seemed to have been the only way to justify her claim to the throne. In a situation in which Shōmu had lost the support of the four Fujiwara brothers due to the plague from 737, his political authority seemed to be not as stable as it had been before the said year. From that point of view, a potential decision of his to simply step down and pass on the throne to his daughter didn't exist as an option. He needed to built the foundation for his successor if he was to expect that his subjects would respect his choice. Thus, Imperial Princess Abe became the first female Crown Prince in the history of the Imperial House.

Interestingly enough, despite her initially positive narrative of the appointment of Imperial Princess Abe as Emperor Shōmu's successor and the interpretation that her father didn't see her simply as a throneholder, Takinami Sadako refutes this assumption shortly thereafter.

“安積は嫡系ではないが唯一の直系皇子である。未婚の女帝となるであろう阿倍のあとを考える時、聖武にとって次なる皇位継承者の決定は重要な課題であったが、その候補者としては安積以外に存在しなかった。阿倍を差し置いて安積を立てるような動きは極度に警戒したが、とって安積の皇位継承権そのものを否定する理由はどこにもなかったし、それはまた大方の遺族たち共通の認識であったとってよい。したがって阿倍の立太子は、そのあとの安積の皇位継承を見すえての措置であり、安積の将来について遺族たちの理解を得る政治的手続きという意味合いもあったのである。阿倍の立太子によって、安積も皇位継承へのパスポートを得たのだった。

以上が、塾慮の末に打ち出された聖武の皇位継承構想であった。”

*[Asaka was not of the direct line, but he was Shōmu's only direct male descendant. When considering who would succeed Abe who would become an empress without any prospect of marriage, the decision on the next successor to the throne was an important issue for Shōmu, and there was no other candidate for the position than Asaka. He was cautious about every potential movement trying to disregard Abe in favor of Asaka, but there was no reason to deny Asaka's succession rights. Moreover, the same opinion in regard to Asaka was shared by the majority of the noble families. Therefore, Abe's appointment as a crown prince was a measure taken in anticipation of Asaka's succession at a later point in time, as well as a political measure to gain the understanding of the noble families in regard to Asaka's future. With Abe's appointment as a crown prince, Asaka also gained a “passport” to the throne.*

*This was Shōmu's plan for the succession to the throne which he had formulated after careful deliberation.]*<sup>1102</sup>

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<sup>1101</sup> Takinami 1998: 50

<sup>1102</sup> Takinami 1998: 51

According to that passage, after all, Shōmu regarded his daughter as a temporary solution to a succession problem which otherwise threatened to put an end to the Tenmu line's hold on the throne. Although the emperor's move to appoint Abe to the position of Crown Prince could be interpreted as his way to show that he didn't consider her future enthronement to be on a level similar to that of previous female sovereigns, the passage above makes it clear that after all, Shōmu still saw Abe's ascension only as an alternative, as a temporary solution to a crisis caused by unfavorable series of events. In accepting his daughter's succession rights, Shōmu planned to use her as a shield for his son until the latter had gathered enough political experience and support for his safe enthronement.

Anyway, Shōmu's plans to prepare Asaka for the throne came to an abrupt end with the sudden death of the prince in 744. Takinami presents an interesting reading of the situation which was briefly mentioned in previous chapters. Contrary to the speculations found in some sources that Fujiwara no Nakamaro supposedly played a role in Asaka's death, or that the whole Fujiwara clan acted against Shōmu's son in an attempt to ensure Crown Prince Abe's successful enthronement, the author speculates that Asaka had actually died of natural causes. As it was previously discussed, Shoku Nihongi reports that the prince passed away from "leg pain".<sup>1103</sup> Takinami argues that:

“これについて十世紀前半に作られた百科書「和名抄」<sup>わみょうしょう</sup>には、「脚の氣一に脚病といふ、俗に阿之乃介<sup>あしのけ</sup>と伝ふ」と記されており、脚氣<sup>かっけ</sup>のことと考えられている。いわゆるビタミンBの欠乏によって手足がしびれたりむくんだりする病気であるが、十世紀後半の医学書「医心方」をみると、動悸<sup>どうき</sup>や息切れ、吐き気などさまざまな病状を伴うことが知られていた。

また近代医学で脚氣衝心<sup>しょうしん</sup>と呼ばれる症状は心臓が肥大し、呼吸困難や意識不明に陥って急死するといわれるから、安積もこの種の病で急逝したということなのだろうか。”

*[In an article of the encyclopedia "Wamyōshō" compiled in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it is written that "there is a certain type of leg disease commonly called ashinoke". It could be assumed that the article describes beriberi - a disease that causes numbness and swelling in the hands and feet due to deficiency of vitamin B. According to "Ishinpō", a medical textbook written in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, beriberi was known to be accompanied by various medical conditions such as palpitations, shortness of breath, and nausea.*

*In addition, in modern medicine, a medical condition called "shōshin" (heart failure) is said to cause enlargement of the heart, shortness of breath, loss of consciousness, and sudden death, so the reason for Asaka's sudden passing could also be attributed to such kind of disease.]<sup>1104</sup>*

According to Takinami Sadako's interpretation, Prince Asaka's demise could have been caused by natural reasons rather than by political intrigues. Nevertheless, it still remains true that the Prince's untimely death put an abrupt end to Emperor Shōmu's plans for the succession. Now, his only option was his daughter, Crown Princess Abe, who ascended the throne in 749 and assumed the name of Emperor Kōken.

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<sup>1103</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平 [Tenpyō] 16.1.11 and 13

<sup>1104</sup> Takinami 1998: 62/63



It seems that for Takinami Sadako, the reign of Emperor Kōken had not been as interesting or as full of mystery as her abdication in 758. In her description of the first rule of the last female sovereign of Nara Japan, she sticks to the narratives found in the official chronicles. However, that seems to not be the case with Kōken's abdication in favor of Crown Prince Ōi, the future Emperor Junnin. As it was already discussed, in her Imperial edict from the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyō hōji 2 (758), the emperor explained that “...ruling over the Realm as Empress [...] a weighty matter and cause of suffering.” As a result, she decided to step down from the throne and to devote herself to her ill mother. In her interpretation of the matter, Takinami Sadako comments that:

“光明子の容態の悪化が讓位の引き金になったことは確かと思われる。

しかし孝謙にとってこの讓位は、必ずしも納得のいくものでなかったのではあるまいか。孝謙は皇太子大炊王の即位がこれほど早く現実のものになるとは予想していなかったように思われるからである。”

*[It is clear that the deterioration of Kōmyōshi's health triggered the abdication.*

*However, for Kōken, the abdication didn't seem as if it was something of which she was completely convinced and to which she gave her full assent. It is likely that she did not expect Crown Prince Ōi's accession to the throne to become a reality so soon.]<sup>1105</sup>*

As it could be seen, Takinami expresses the view that Emperor Kōken most likely didn't step down from the throne of her own volition. In fact, her untimely abdication which came only a year and several months after Prince Ōi's appointment as a Crown Prince was something unexpected. In the long history of the Imperial House, Emperor Monmu was the only ruler who ascended the throne after only six months as a Crown Prince. In any other cases, the heir apparent remained in that position several years, the reason for that having been that he could thus learn from the sitting sovereign and establish political relations which would support him/her throughout the reign (for example, Emperor Shōmu had been a Crown Prince for a period of 10 years before his accession, while his daughter Kōken waited a year longer – eleven years, thus setting the longest waiting period for a Crown Prince before his/her enthronement). From that point of view, Monmu's case could be considered an exception to the general rule which was brought forth by outer circumstances such as Emperor Jitō's determination to not let the line of her son Prince Kusakabe die out. However, Prince Ōi's case could in no way be considered extraordinary. Emperor Kōken was already occupying the throne for nine years, a rather long period for a female sovereign. Moreover, during those years, she seemed satisfied with her position and didn't regard it as a burden even after the death of her father in 756. But then she suddenly decided to step down and pointed out her determination to fulfill her filial duties toward her mother as the reason for that decision. Takinami Sadako expresses the view that:

“これまで述べたように、聖武の讓位後における仲麻呂の権勢の拠るどころは皇太后光明子の紫微中台にあった。しかしその光明子もすでに六〇歳を迎え、病気がちであったとなれば、仲麻呂の権力基盤も動揺せざるを得ない。仲麻呂にとって淳仁の即位は紫微中台にかわる新たな権力の基盤づくりであった。しかも淳仁（大炊王）は仲麻呂の養子であったから、光明子（仲麻呂の叔母）や孝謙（仲麻呂の従姉）よりも身近な関係であった。このようなことからわたくしは、孝謙の讓位は光明子の病気に乗じ

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<sup>1105</sup> Takinami 1998: 116

て、仲麻呂が強引に押し進めたものとみる。むろん先の孝謙の下した譲位の宣命の内容からみて、孝謙自身、納得した上での譲位であったことは疑いないが、さりと淳仁の即位を完全に了解したものでなかったのである。天皇即位の表徴である代始めの改元を認めなかったのは、淳仁擁立に狂奔する仲麻呂に対して孝謙が抱いた不安感、警戒心の表われであったといつてよい。”

*[As I have mentioned so far, after Shōmu's abdication, Nakamaro's power was based on Empress Kōmyōshi's Shibichūdai. However, Kōmyōshi was already sixty years old and prone to illness, and it was natural for Nakamaro's power base to be shaken from those developments. For Nakamaro, Junnin's accession to the throne was like the establishment of a new power base to replace the Shibichūdai. Furthermore, since Junnin (Prince Ōi) was his adopted son, the former would have a closer relationship with him than with Kōmyōshi (Nakamaro's aunt) or with Kōken (Nakamaro's cousin). For these reasons, I believe that Kōken's abdication was forced by Nakamaro who took advantage of Kōmyōshi's illness. Of course, considering the contents of the abdication edict issued by Kōken, there is no doubt that Kōken herself was convinced of the importance of the abdication, but she did not completely agree with the accession of Junnin. The fact that she did not approve the change of the era at the beginning of the new emperor's reign, was a sign of the anxiety and wariness that Kōken felt toward Nakamaro who acted as Junnin's main supporter.]<sup>1106</sup>*

It can be inferred from that passage that Kōken had been reluctant to abdicate not because of Prince Ōi's supposed inexperience in political matters but rather due to the latter's close relationship with Fujiwara no Nakamaro whom she didn't trust to serve the new emperor loyally without seeking benefits for himself. In order to make her anxiety widely known she supposedly didn't allow the change of the era name, which was otherwise a common practice after the ascension of a new sovereign.

Even though Kōken's filial duty toward Empress Dowager Kōmyōshi was pointed out as one of the reasons for her abdication in 758, nothing could prevent the death of the Retired Emperor's mother in 760. According to Takinami Sadako, that was a serious blow to Kōken who loved her parent dearly:

“父不比等の死にはじまり、基王、母三千代、四兄弟、そして夫の死と、次々に不幸に見舞われた光明子も哀れであったふびんが、最愛の母を亡くした孝謙はもっと不憫であった。”

*[It was true that Kōmyōshi, whose life was full of unlucky occurrences such as the loss of her father Fuhito, the deaths of her son Prince Motoi, her mother Michiyo, her four brothers, and eventually her husband, could be considered pitiful, but it was actually Kōken who was more pitiful after the loss of her most beloved mother.]<sup>1107</sup>*

In that aspect, Takinami Sadako takes a position different from that of Sakaguchi Angō who regards the death of Kōken's parents as her winning back her freedom. According to Takinami, however, the Retired Emperor loved her mother dearly and the latter's death could be considered a major blow to her. Thus, in the short span of two years, Kōken lost not only her position but also the only close relative of hers. From that point of view, it could be assumed that the Retired Emperor's illness from Tenpyō hōji 5 (761) had something to do with her personal losses. It was also around that time when she first

<sup>1106</sup> Takinami 1998: 117

<sup>1107</sup> Takinami 1998: 131

met the Buddhist monk Dôkyô, who later played an important political role during her reign as Emperor Shôtoku. Apparently it was the monk and his untraditional healing methods which returned the Retired Emperor's confidence in her abilities and encouraged her to pursue Junnin's dethronement and her own reascension.

Speaking of the rift between the sitting and the retired sovereign, some sources (for example, Shoku Nihongi) speculate that the deciding factor in the conflict between them were the rumors about an immoral relationship between Kôken and Dôkyô. Although there is no historical evidence to prove that, there are also assumptions that Junnin's attempts to speak badly of Dôkyô in Kôken's presence, as well as his demands that she should not see the Buddhist monk anymore became the reason for the Retired Emperor's edict from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 6 (762) with which she practically took all political authority from him. In previous chapters, it was commented that the possibility of Fujiwara no Nakamaro and his supporters deliberately trying to tarnish the Retired Emperor's reputation with rumors about her supposed indecent relationship with the Buddhist monk could not be completely excluded. It was explained that Nakamaro's tool in that strategy could have been Jikun, a fellow monk who also acted as bettô (head) of the Yamashinaji Temple until his dismissal in 762. Takinami Sadako further elaborates on that matter:

“しかしわたくしは、この件には火付け役がいたと考えている。少僧部<sup>じくん</sup>滋訓である。

滋訓は道鏡と同じ河内国出身で、聖武の看病禪師として力を発揮し、天平勝宝八歳（七五六）五月、少僧都に任じられている。時に六六歳、道鏡よりは十四、五歳年長であったろうが、道鏡の先輩格であった。その上、仲麻呂や光明子の信任を得て山階寺<sup>やましなでら</sup>別当・興福寺別当となり、孝謙朝でも仲麻呂の仏教政策推進の中心人物となっていた。[…]

こうしてみると滋訓と道鏡は、同じ時期宮中供奉していたことが知られる。おそらくスキャンダルをいち早くキャッチしたのも滋訓であろう。滋訓にしてみれば、道鏡が孝謙と急速に近づき寵を受けるのを快く思えるはずがない。こうして慈訓は正義感にかられてか、それとも仲麻呂の歡心を買おうとしてかはともかく、仲麻呂に報告する。それが淳仁を通しての諫言になったとみてまず間違いない。”

*[However, I believe that there was a spark that ignited this incident: shôsôzu Jikun.*

*Jikun was from the province Kawachi, the birthplace of Dôkyô, and gained power as Shômu's private healer monk. In the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô Shôho 8 (756), he was appointed as shôsôzu. At the time he was 66 years old, probably fourteen or fifteen years older than Dôkyô, and could be considered Dôkyô's senior. In addition, having won the trust of Nakamaro and Kômyôshi, he became the head priest of both Yamashinadera Temple and Kôfukuji Temple, and thus a central figure in the promotion of Nakamaro's Buddhist policy during the reign of Emperor Kôken. [...]*

*Thus, it is known that Jikun and Dôkyô were both serving as inner offerers at court at the same time. It is likely that Jikun was the first to get wind of the scandal. From Jikun's point of view, there was no way that he felt comfortable with Dôkyô's rapid acquaintance with and his gaining the affection of Kôken. Whether out of a sense of justice or in an attempt to win*

*Nakamaro's favor, Jikun reported the incident to Nakamaro. It is safe to say that his report formed the basis for Junnin's reprimand.]*<sup>1108</sup>

As it could be seen, Takinami seems completely sure that Jikun had been the one responsible for the rumors about Dôkyô and Kôken. While the author doesn't assume a direct interference from Nakamaro in the matter, she still expresses the view that Jikun's actions had been beneficial to the Retired Emperor's cousin. More interesting, however, is the fact that the author is quick to conclude that Dôkyô gained the "affection" of the Retired Emperor shortly after their encounter. Thus, it seems that Takinami Sadako also supports the notion that Kôken had actually been in love with Dôkyô. Moreover, as it could be seen in the second paragraph, she writes about a "scandal" at court which supposedly came to Jikun's knowledge. That, combined with the word "affection" when writing about the relationship between Kôken and Dôkyô, serves as an indication of Takinami's opinion on the matter. From the author's point of view, there was surely something deeper than a friendship or a subject's loyal service to his ruler between the Retired Emperor and the Buddhist monk. That hypothesis is reconfirmed upon reading Takinami's interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident.

“これに対して道鏡は皇位に異常なほどの執心を示しており、それを断念させるのが容易でないことは称徳には十分わかっていた。しかし無理をして皇位につければ、政治的混乱を引き起し、道鏡が破滅するのは火を見るよりも明らかであった。それは道鏡を寵愛する称徳には堪えがたいところであった。道鏡を皇位につけることはできない—それが阿曾麻呂の託宣を受け取った称徳のたどりついた結論であった。

阿曾麻呂の奏上を寄貨として、称徳は道鏡の野心を抑える決意をしたとしてもおかしくはない。そしてこれを断念させるには、道鏡が皇胤でないことを理由に、即位が不可能であるとの神託を受ける以外には有り得ないだろう。こうして道鏡の即位を抑えるために、称徳にとっても超越的論拠としての神託が必要となった。清麻呂を宇佐に派遣した理由である。

ここで想起されるのが、『続日本紀』に、称徳が清麻呂を使者として宇佐へ発遣するにあたり、「しょうしか牀下」すなわち玉座のもとにまで呼び寄せて意を伝えたことと記されていることである。たかだか従五位下の下級貴族にすぎない清麻呂を、それ近くまで召したのは全程のことがあってのものである。称徳が清麻呂に打ち明け、期待したものは、道鏡を皇位につけるためにふさわしい神託ではなく、むしろ即位を否定する託宣であったと考える。阿曾麻呂の託宣を否定する神託を持ち帰るように。

称徳は出立する清麻呂に因果を含めてそう命じたものと思う。道鏡が清麻呂の懐柔に狂奔している時、称徳はそれの阻止に苦慮し、同じ清麻呂に協力を求めているのである。“

*[On the other hand, Dôkyô was unusually obsessed with the throne, and Shôtoku knew fully well that it would not be easy to get him to give it up. However, it was obvious that forcing him*

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<sup>1108</sup> Takinami 1998: 139

*to take the throne would cause political turmoil and eventually ruin him. This was unbearable for Shôtoku who favored Dôkyô. Therefore, the conclusion that Shôtoku reached after receiving Asomaro's [report about the] oracle was that she could not let Dôkyô ascend the throne.*

*It is not surprising that Shôtoku decided to suppress Dôkyô's ambition with the help of Asomaro's message. The only way to make him give up his ambition would be to receive an oracle saying that it was impossible for him to ascend the throne because he was not an Imperial descendant. Thus, in order to suppress Dôkyô's accession to the throne, Shôtoku also needed an oracle as a transcendental argument. This is the reason why Kiyomaro was sent to Usa.*

*It may be recalled that, according to the Shoku Nihongi, around the time when Shôtoku sent Kiyomaro as an envoy to Usa, she summoned him to court in order to convey her wishes. The fact that a low-ranking noble such as Kiyomaro, whose highest court position was that of Junior Fifth rank Lower, was summoned to court could be attributed to various reasons. Shôtoku confided in Kiyomaro and shared her expectations for an oracle that would deny Dôkyô's ascension to the throne rather than one that would encourage that notion. Thus, Kiyomaro was sent to Usa in order for him to bring back an oracle denying the first one reported by Asomaro.*

*I believe that Shôtoku issued a fateful order to the departing Kiyomaro. While Dôkyô was busy to win Kiyomaro for his cause, Shôtoku made everything possible to obstruct him, thus asking Kiyomaro for the latter's cooperation.]<sup>1109</sup>*

Takinami Sadako's reading of the circumstances behind the Dôkyô Incident introduces several interesting ideas. Firstly, a notion that was only hinted in the previous passage finds its confirmation here: according to Takinami's assessment, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku most likely had deep feelings for Dôkyô. To be precise, however, the author does not state firmly that those sentiments had actually been love as she uses the somewhat vague word "chôai" (寵愛) which could be translated as "favor" or "affection". In that train of thought, the only thing that could spark a controversy is the second character which means "love". As a matter of fact, "chôai" was also used in the Shoku Nihongi chronicle from the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 8 (764) which narrates the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro. There, the word is part of the explanation for Nakamaro's dissatisfaction with the Retired Emperor:

*"At that time, Dôkyô simply waited on [Emperor Takano] by staying by her side, and thus received her favor. Oshikatsu was so affected by it that he became restless and let his feelings be known to Emperor Takano."<sup>1110</sup>*

As it was already discussed, the probable reason for that statement had been the circulating rumors about the nature of Retired Emperor Kôken's and Dôkyô's relationship. Thus, the chronicle introduced two notions: Firstly, there were rumors of Kôken and Dôkyô at court, and secondly, the Buddhist monk was so strongly preferred by the Retired Emperor to any other courtier that Fujiwara no Nakamaro considered him a threat to his position in the government and thus decided to rebel against her. Interestingly enough, Takinami Sadako uses the same "chôai" which was firstly introduced in Shoku Nihongi. Following the author's narrative, however, it soon becomes clear why she decided to utilize namely that word. Despite her favor or affection for the monk, Shôtoku did not want to give him the throne. An explanation for the emperor's decision could be found in the first sentence of the narrative

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<sup>1109</sup> Takinami 1998: 190

<sup>1110</sup> 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 8.9.18

which says that “*Dôkyô was unusually obsessed with the throne*”. These words portray the Buddhist monk as a greedy and power-hungry person who would have done anything in his power to reach the highest political position in the country. Emperor Shôtoku favored him strongly but at the same time saw his dark side, that is his greed and desire for power. Besides, she knew fully well that giving the throne to such a person would cause turmoils in the political life of the country. Therefore, the emperor decided to put an end to Dôkyô’s ambitions once and for all by ordering Wake no Kiyomaro to bring back an oracle which spoke strongly against the potential ascension of the monk. Another interesting point in Takinami’s narrative of the Dôkyô Incident is her interpretation of Yuge no Kiyohito’s role in the whole situation. According to her,

“それとならんで注目されるのは、道鏡の弟弓削浄人がこの時大宰帥（長官）であったことである。浄人は大納言との兼任であったから現地に下ったことはないと思うが、関わりの深い阿曾麻呂と謀<sup>はか</sup>って八幡宮神官にもちかけ、神託事件のお膳立てをした張本人であったことは、まず間違いない。八幡宮では<sup>おおが</sup>大神・<sup>からしまのすぐり</sup>宇佐・辛嶋勝の三氏の神職団が競合していたから、かねてから中央指向をもつ宇佐八幡として、この話に乗る可能性は十分にあった。こうして阿曾麻呂を介して<sup>トライアングル</sup>三者連合が形成され、託宣奏上が計画されたとみられる。道鏡が失脚した日に、阿曾麻呂（八月二十一日、<sup>たね</sup>多嶺島守に左遷）と浄人（翌二十二日、息三人とともに土佐に配流）が処罰されているのも、そうした推測を可能にする。”

*[It should also be noted that at that time, it was Dôkyô's younger brother, Yuge no Kiyohito, who was Dazai no sochi (Head of Dazaifu). As Kiyohito also held the position of Dainagon, it is highly unlikely that he personally went to Dazaifu. However, there is no doubt that he was the one who arranged the oracle incident by conspiring with Asomaro, with whom he had a close relationship, for the latter to approach the priests of Hachiman Shrine. Since the three clans of Ôga, Usa, and Karashima-no-Suguri were competing with each other for the right to serve Hachiman, there was a good chance that, considering their initial ambitions in regard to Hachiman, they would have agreed to this proposal. Thus, a triangle was formed through Asomaro who acted as the middleman, and it could be assumed that the false oracle was planned. The fact that Asomaro (who was demoted to the position of governor of Tane Island on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month) and Kiyomaro (who was exiled to Tosa together with his three sons on the following day) were punished on the same day on which Dôkyô lost his political standing also makes such assumption plausible.]<sup>1111</sup>*

As it could be seen, Takinami does not exclude the possibility that the whole Dôkyô Incident was connected with the monk. Apparently it had been Kiyohito, Dôkyô’s brother, who actively participated in the whole planning and the “birth” of the first oracle. Thus, Takinami Sadako opposes other readings of the incident<sup>1112</sup> which express the view that Dôkyô could have been simply a tool in the hands of his powerful enemies from the Fujiwara clan.

Anyway, regardless of Yuge no Kiyohito’s direct involvement in the oracles, Wake no Kiyomaro’s role in the Incident seemed to have been one directly managed by the sovereign herself. Takinami’s interpretation of Kiyomaro’s responsibility could possibly explain the fact that Emperor Shôtoku

<sup>1111</sup> Takinami 1998: 184

<sup>1112</sup> See Sakaguchi 1988: 12

rewarded members of the Wake clan with positions and court ranks in the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769).<sup>1113</sup> On the other hand, however, the author doesn't give any clarification of Kiyomaro's exile and Emperor Shôtoku's mention of "lies" and conspirations which could be read in her edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769). If the second oracle was orchestrated by the emperor herself, then it would have made little sense for her to accuse the siblings of trying to deceive her and to punish them by changing their names and sending Kiyomaro into exile. If one assumes that Shôtoku wanted to appease the disappointed Dôkyô by sacrificing a loyal subject such as Kiyomaro, then one is left with the impression that the emperor didn't know how to treasure her own people and moved them as pawns on a chessboard. The initial notion of her having been objective enough to see Dôkyô's dark side despite her sentiments toward him, which led her to deny him the throne, would be tarnished by the thought that she was too calculative and cunning to acknowledge her subjects' loyalty. Thus, Takinami Sadako offers another reading of these developments. According to her, Kiyomaro's exile had apparently been the only way to save his life from Dôkyô's fury. It was also Shôtoku who ordered Fujiwara no Momokawa to support Wake no Kiyomaro on the latter's way to Ôsumi.<sup>1114</sup> In order to support her claims, Takinami cites the Nihon kôki chronicle which reads that

“天皇不忍誅。”<sup>1115</sup>

[Die Himmlische Majestät brachte es nicht über sich, ihn zu richten.]<sup>1116</sup>

Thus, the author paints a picture in which Shôtoku orchestrated the second oracle in order to prevent Dôkyô from becoming emperor. Despite her reluctance to give him the throne, however, she still felt sentiments toward him. Therefore, she tried to appease his anger by exacting seemingly harsh punishments on Kiyomaro and his sister Hôkin. Change of the name and exile, however, could be considered mild sentences compared to the possibility of Dôkyô executing Kiyomaro in his anger. From that point of view, it seemed that Shôtoku tried to find the balance between relieving Dôkyô's anger and not losing the loyalty of her subjects.

All things considered, the controversies around the last female ruler of Nara Japan did not diminish with the passage of time. On the contrary, they became even more, thus leaving almost no possibility for one to find the actual historical truth. Depending on the author's own reading of the matter, a certain chronicle could be interpreted in a different way, and a completely different image of the persons involved could be created. Thus, in Takinami Sadako's book, one finds the portrait of a woman who had been valued by her father to the point that he decided to appoint her as the first female crown prince. However, the reader soon finds out that Imperial Princess Abe was not regarded as an equal to the previous rulers of the country and Shômu actually planned to use her as a throneholder before the ascension of the son born to him by Agatainukai no Hirotoji. Then, one sees that the last female emperor of Nara Japan could not be completely free even after her abdication in which her cousin Fujiwara no Nakamaro seemed to have played a decisive part. It is inferred that while Kôken saw her abdication as an important, and necessary, step, she was not completely convinced that Prince Ôi was capable enough to successfully succeed her on the throne. At the same time, Takinami Sadako doesn't completely deny the possibility that Kôken stepped down in order to take care of her mother. According to her interpretation, the Retired Emperor loved Kômyôshi dearly and was devastated by her loss. In such difficult moment, it was the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who managed to win the favor of

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<sup>1113</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.6.29 and 神護景雲 [Jingo keiun] 3.6.26

<sup>1114</sup> See Takinami 1998: 191

<sup>1115</sup> 日本後紀 [Nihon kôki], Vol.8, 延暦 [Enryaku] 18.2.21

<sup>1116</sup> Nihon kôki, transl. by Bohner 1940: 269

the last female ruler of Nara Japan. However, it was not long after their encounter that rumors about the nature of their relationship began to circulate around the court. Takinami Sadako accuses the monk Jikun who apparently was so envious of Dôkyô and his success that he decided to spread the story of the “love” between the monk and the Retired Emperor. The author’s interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident, however, shows that despite Shôtoku’s sentiments toward Dôkyô, her feelings didn’t disturb her objective view on the monk’s desire for power and his obsession with the throne. Seeing that his potential enthronement would cause harm to the political stability of the country, she orchestrated the second oracle with the help of her loyal subject Wake no Kiyomaro. Then, she tried to find the balance between saving Kiyomaro from Dôkyô’s wrath and appeasing the infuriated monk. Thus, the Imperial edict from the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of Jingo keiun 3 (769) is described as having been simply a charade, a mask to hide the emperor’s true intentions to spare the life of her loyal subject. In her interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident, Takinami Sadako portrays Emperor Shôtoku as a smart and capable ruler. As a human being, she could not be held responsible for her sentiments toward Dôkyô. That affection, however, didn’t interfere in her duties as sovereign and the one in charge of the continuation of the Imperial rule. Thus, one sees the picture of one very human emperor who had feelings as any other person but who also didn’t forget her initial responsibility for her country.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it could be said that the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, has been a difficult task for each and every author who had attempted to do so. The reasons for that could be divided into two types: the first kind being personal (internal) ones, while the second contains outer factors, which in one way or another influenced the objective description of that female sovereign. The internal difficulties could be explained by the fact that Kôken/Shôtoku had been only the second female ruler who ascended the throne two times, the other having been Kôgyoku/Saimei, and thus ruled under two different Imperial names. In some cases (for example, Fusô ryakuki, Jinnô shôtoki, or Nihon Ôdai Ichiran), the first reign of Kôken/Shôtoku from 749 to 758 is often portrayed in a different way from her second rule from 764 to 770. In the case of Fusô ryakuki from the Heian period, the reign of Emperor Kôken is narrated in a manner similar to the chronicles of female rulers who were regarded as “throneholders”. Thus, the main events noted down by monk Kôen had been of religious nature. In contrast, the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku presents a completely different image from the previous religious-oriented one. The second rule of the last female sovereign of Nara Japan is portrayed as that of a strong and decisive ruler who did not hesitate to act against her political enemies in a manner similar to her male counterparts. The same tendency could be seen in Kitabatake Chikafusa’s work Jinnô shôtoki from the Muromachi period. Chikafusa compiled Kôken’s nine-year-long rule in several sentences which did not say anything significant about the reign itself except for the fact that it came to an end with the appointment of Prince Ôi as successor and the female ruler’s abdication. In contrast to the scarce information about Emperor Kôken’s rule, Emperor Shôtoku’s chronicle is relatively long and one sees a portrayal which tends to present the sovereign as a “bad ruler”. Firstly, she is described as a capricious woman who easily changed her affections from one courtier to another. Then, her reascension to the throne is reported with the rather ambiguous phrase “*the most unusual of developments*”. Then, Dôkyô’s rise to power is more or less presented as Shôtoku’s failure as a ruler. The criticism of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, however, reaches its peak in the last part of the chronicle which narrates the Dôkyô Incident and Shôtoku’s death. In it, her passing is described as the deities’ direct interference in the worldly matters in order to restore the direct Imperial line’s hold on the throne. Interestingly enough, the Edo-period work Nihon Ôdai Ichiran follows the same pattern. While in the chronicle of Emperor Kôken a negative feeling toward the last female ruler of Nara Japan can be felt, the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku’s reign creates a somewhat



different impression. Firstly, one sees a comparison between Kôken/Shôtoku and Kôgyoku/Saimei which could be interpreted in two different ways: either as a recognition of the last female ruler of Nara Japan or as a deliberate attempt to diminish her authority as a ruler since Kôgyoku/Saimei could be described as basically having been a “throneholder”. A subtle criticism of Emperor Kôken can be felt in the chronicle regarding the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. In it, it is explicitly emphasized that Fujiwara no Nakamaro was elevated to a high court position thanks to the “favor” of the emperor and not due to his own talents. Interestingly enough, the subtle criticism which could be felt throughout the Emperor Kôken chronicle vanishes in the narrative of Emperor Shôtoku’s reign. The report about the Dôkyô Incident speculates that the sovereign didn’t want to make Dôkyô her successor and even stopped him from killing Wake no Kiyomaro. To support that claim, Hayashi Gahô narrates that it had been actually Dôkyô who in his fury changed Kiyomaro’s name and exiled him, thus contradicting the Imperial edict of Emperor Shôtoku in which she orders the punishment of both Wake no Kiyomaro and his sister Hôkin. It could be speculated that the author deliberately created the controversy in an attempt to portray Emperor Shôtoku as a ruler who strongly opposed the notion that a person outside of the Imperial House could ascend the throne. The last chronicle concerning the emperor’s death in which it is strongly insinuated that Shôtoku had been poisoned by the power-hungry Dôkyô portrays the last female ruler of Nara Japan as a tragic figure.

As it can be seen from that short summary, in all of these three sources, the reader can observe a certain “character development” of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. While Emperor Kôken is often described as an insignificant woman who wasn’t interested in politics but at the same time didn’t want to accept the guidance of her father Retired Emperor Shômu to the point that she even disrespected him by deposing the Crown Prince chosen by him, Emperor Shôtoku is portrayed as a strong and cunning ruler who didn’t hesitate to act against her enemies and to make important political decisions. This rather drastic development could be attributed to the initial view on the female rulers in Japan. Despite that not being explicitly defined by law, female emperors were regarded as throneholders, as convenient candidates to be enthroned in turbulent times in which there were no suitable men who could ascend the throne. While in some cases such as those of Emperor Jitô, Emperor Genmei, or Emperor Genshō these women sat on the throne for a certain period of time until a suitable male successor emerged, there were also situations in which female sovereigns ruled for decades and were used as convenient shields by powerful courtiers who influenced and navigated their political decisions. Such had been the case with Emperor Suiko who had to accept the advice of Soga no Umako, or of Emperor Kôgyoku/Saimei who left all political decisions to her son, Naka no Ôe, later Emperor Tenji. In that train of thought, it could be assumed that Emperor Kôken was considered by many as the next politically incompetent female emperor who would “hold” the throne until a male successor emerged. From that point of view, one could understand the insufficient information about the reign of Emperor Kôken. The circumstances, however, changed upon the reascension of Retired Emperor Kôken who assumed the name Emperor Shôtoku. After all, she suppressed a rebellion and even dethroned the sitting sovereign Junnin on her way to the throne. These facts spoke of Kôken/Shôtoku’s inner strength and determination. Moreover, if she regarded herself simply as a throneholder, she would not have gone to such lengths as to fight over the throne. The abovementioned developments most certainly changed the views of the authors of historical chronicles. As a result, the narratives of Emperor Shôtoku’s reign seemed much more detailed and complex, thus creating a complete opposite image from that of Emperor Kôken.

The same tendency, however, didn’t remain confined only to the old histories. Newer Japanese literature and even historical works also created a rather controversial image of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Sakaguchi Angô, for example, authored two books in which Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and her monk minister Dôkyô could be considered main characters. In both works, the reader sees the

“character development” of Kôken from a daughter shackled and constricted by her parents to Shôtoku - a strong woman and a cunning politician. At the same time, however, one sees the opinion that the oppression from her early years warped the female emperor’s understanding of feelings and matters of the heart. In the book “Dôkyô”, she is portrayed as a woman who was easily deceived by power-hungry men such as Fujiwara no Nakamaro and Dôkyô, and led to believe that she loved them. As it could be expected from a historical novel, Sakaguchi Angô creates a rather romantic image of Kôken/Shôtoku. Regardless of the fact that she is portrayed in a more human way, the tendency to create a dual image of the last female ruler of Nara Japan can also be observed there. At first, she had been an oppressed daughter whose parents even banned her from marrying. After their death, however, the seemingly weak woman rose above all expectations to become a powerful and independent ruler. The modern historical books also didn’t deviate from that path. Despite the more scientific approach of Takinami Sadako in her book ““Kôken tennô: the last female emperor” (最後の女帝孝謙天皇; Saigo no jotei Kôken tennô), the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan in a more human way can be clearly observed. At first, the reader sees that Imperial Princess Abe had supposedly been treasured by her father Emperor Shômu. As the narrative continues, however, one understands that she was regarded at best as a powerful throneholder by the person whom she trusted the most. That impression is reconfirmed as one reads the hypothesis that Emperor Kôken’s cousin Fujiwara no Nakamaro supposedly had been the one who pressured her into abdicating in favor of Prince Ôi who became Emperor Junnin. Speaking of Kôken’s stepping down from the throne, Takinami Sadako introduces a more human aspect of her personality. Based on her abdication edict in which the sovereign explained her decision to renounce the throne by her mother’s poor health, Takinami expresses the opinion that Kôken had actually loved Empress Dowager Kômuyoshi dearly and was strongly affected by her death in 760. In such a difficult moment, it was the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who managed to win the favor of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Unfortunately, rumors about the nature of their relationship began to circulate around the court soon thereafter. While the author does not completely deny the possibility of Emperor Shôtoku having had any sentiments toward the Buddhist monk, she prefers to focus on the fact that the last female ruler of Nara Japan regarded the country’s well-being as a priority over her own feelings. The author’s interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident shows that Shôtoku’s potential feelings toward Dôkyô didn’t obstruct her awareness of the monk’s greediness and desire for power. Seeing that a potential enthronement of his would do no good for the political stability of the country, she used the help of her loyal subject Wake no Kiyomaro and changed the second oracle so that Dôkyô could never reach the throne. In her interpretation of the Dôkyô Incident, Takinami Sadako portrays Shôtoku as a smart and capable ruler. Despite the possibility that she could have had sentiments toward Dôkyô, she was able to suppress them when it came to matters concerning the stability of the country or the future of the Imperial House. Thus, one sees the picture of one very human emperor who put her duties toward the state before her feelings. As it could be seen, the tendency to develop the “character” of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku could be observed even in historical books. While she was portrayed as a demure and filial daughter during her period as Crown Prince and her first reign as Emperor Kôken, the image of Emperor Shôtoku was developed to that of an independent, capable and responsible ruler who put the country before herself and didn’t let her personal feelings interfere in her political decisions.

All things considered, it could be speculated that the most important reason for the controversial portrayal of the last female emperor of Nara Japan had been her reascension to the throne. While her first reign could be assumed to have been simply a transition period necessitated by the lack of suitable male candidates for the throne, the same could not be said about her second rule as Emperor Shôtoku. After all, it was the Retired Emperor who decided to take back the Imperial throne and even fought her way back to it. Under such circumstances, one could hardly describe her reascension and second

rule as those of a throneholder. From that point of view, it should be no wonder that the portrayal of Emperor Shôtoku in historical sources, historical novels or modern historical scientific works underwent a significant positive change.

Anyway, while the abovementioned factors could be considered the main reason for the dual description of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, there are several other points which to a certain degree also influenced the narrative of the last female sovereign of Nara Japan. Firstly, one should mention the cultural and religious tendencies in Japan at the time of the compilation of the respective historical, literary, or scientific source. That is to say, certain teachings strongly influenced the views of the Japanese society on important matters such as the position of the women in society and politics, the Imperial succession and legitimacy or the role of religion and its clergy in the political world. Interestingly enough, in most cases, these ideologies had a foreign character as they were imported into Japan from the continent, China in particular. One such “imported” view was the Confucian teaching that the women didn’t hold any value by themselves and could only be given such as an “extension” of the men who stood by her side (father, husband, son, and so on). While it should be noted that not all Chinese, or for that matter Confucian, ideas were readily accepted and assimilated in Nara Japan, it could also not be denied that some of these notions took root on Japanese soil and thus were able to alter the views of the society. Readiness to accept and adopt these ideas could be seen in turbulent and politically instable periods of Japanese history such as the Kamakura or Muromachi periods. It was then that the women began to lose its significance as religious pillar of society, a role which was typical of early Japan. Under such circumstances, it was easy to extend the notion of the inferiority of the women to the female rulers of Japan. Thus, a female emperor began to be regarded as a phenomenon which in certain cases had been inevitable and thus could be tolerated to a certain extent but which could and should not hold any real authority. From that point of view, it could be seen why the female rulers were regarded as unequal to their male counterparts. The abovementioned point would also explain the scarce narrative of Emperor Kôken’s reign which is to be found in many sources from the later epochs of Japanese history. Interestingly enough, however, despite omitting important details from her rule, these works never forgot to address the Confucian teaching on filial piety and children’s duties toward their parents in relation to Prince Funado’s appointment as a Crown Prince and Emperor Kôken’s decision to depose him. In contrast to sources such as Shoku Nihongi which simply pointed out that “*The Crown Prince’s appointment was expressed by the late Emperor in his last will and his wish had been accordingly fulfilled.*”<sup>1117</sup>, other chronicles such as Nihon Ôdai Ichiran which had been compiled in the strongly Neo-Confucian-oriented Edo society express criticism of Kôken’s unwillingness to obey her father’s wishes: “*Although Dainagon Fujiwara no Toyonari (Thengyuan Fungtchhing) pointed out that the prince had been appointed Crown Prince as per her father’s wish, she replied that she was dissatisfied with him and didn’t want him as her Crown Prince.*”<sup>1118</sup> The fact that Nihon Ôdai Ichiran emphasized that Fujiwara no Toyonari “*pointed out that the prince had been appointed Crown Prince as per her father’s wish*” could be explained only by the strong Confucian view that children ought to show absolute respect for their parents and obey their wishes. However, since Kôken failed to follow her father’s will and preferred to depose Funado, she was regarded as an unfilial daughter who didn’t honor her late parent.

Domestic beliefs such as the uniqueness of Japan as the land of the kami also strongly influenced the portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. In Kitabatake Chikafusa’s Jinnô shôtoki, the idea of shinkoku (divine land) was further developed by the author and transformed into the notion of “shôtô”, that is the idea of the direct and indirect line of Imperial succession. According to Chikafusa, the

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<sup>1117</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 天平宝字 [Tenpyô hôji] 1.3.29

<sup>1118</sup> See Nihon Ôdai Ichiran, transl. by Titsingh 1834: 75

successors of emperors who didn't belong to the direct line of succession were fated to be bad rulers since they didn't possess the right to sit on the throne. In that train of thought, Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku was considered a "bad ruler" from the start since she belonged to the Tenmu (Kusakabe) line of the Imperial House. According to Chikafusa, even the Dôkyô Incident could be interpreted as the deities' way to return Imperial authority to the direct line of succession. While the author didn't accuse the emperor of trying to put the monk on the throne, he regarded her inability to control him as her political failure. Therefore, her passing away without a successor was considered the natural end of the unnatural Imperial line's hold on the throne. To be precise, however, despite Chikafusa's strong criticism of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, it could not be said that he had any personal prejudices against her in particular. It could rather be said that Chikafusa's critical view on Kôken/Shôtoku's two reigns had been the result of his general opinion on the matter of Imperial succession.

Buddhist teachings also played their role in the formation of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's image. That could be best seen in the satirical works with semi-entertaining, semi-educational character *Nihon ryôiki* and *Kojidan*. The *setsuwa* collection *Nihon ryôiki* was compiled by the Buddhist monk Kyôkai whose purpose in life was to "offer [his] hand to lead them [the people] to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil."<sup>1119</sup> Therefore, it could be assumed that the stories narrated by him could be seen as anecdotes, the purpose of which was to show the people what is good and what is bad and thus to guide them in the right direction. In that train of thought, it could be speculated that Kyôkai regarded the thorough portrayal of the relationship between Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and Dôkyô as well as the monk's physical characteristics not as a criticism but rather as a guidance. While the good intentions of the author could explain the purpose of his stories, one could hardly understand why the monk decided to use such graphic description of the female emperor's and Dôkyô's genitals or the nature of their relationship. After all, it is one thing to speculate about a potential love story between Kôken/Shôtoku and her monk minister, but completely another to speak of the relationship between them as a matter of fact and to portray their sexual organs in a most obscene manner. In that train of thought, to spread unconfirmed rumors and to talk in an inappropriate and disrespectful way about a member of the Imperial family could be considered as immoral as the supposed intimate relationship between a tonsured female emperor and a Buddhist monk had been. The *setsuwa* collection *Kojidan* follows the same pattern. The *setsuwa* collection's author Minamoto no Akikane had been a politician-turned-Buddhist monk and his stories could thus be assessed as reflection of both his political and religious, or for that matter moral, views on different matters. His work, however, could not escape from the typical trope found in all *setsuwa* stories: to point out immoral behavior as a way to "guide the people in the right direction". In that train of thought, Emperor Shôtoku is portrayed as a lustful and immoral woman who not only had a sexual relationship with the Buddhist monk Dôkyô but also, upon seeing the monk's inability to satisfy her in bed, found another sinful way to satiate her needs that eventually led to her death. While the *Nihon ryôiki* story could be considered an attack on Dôkyô, the *Kojidan* story could be regarded as criticism of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. It is strongly insinuated that her immoral ways eventually became the reason for her death. Similar to *Nihon ryôiki*, the purpose of the *Kojidan* story is to advise the people against sin and thus to educate them. At the same time, however, in Minamoto no Akikane's narrative, one finds the same problem as in *Nihon ryôiki*: the way in which the story is presented is much too disrespectful toward a member of the Imperial family. Thus, both stories and their authors committed the one mistake against which they supposedly wanted to advise the masses: in their attempt to point out bad morals, they narrated their stories in an inappropriate and obscene way and even accepted rumors without any historical backing

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<sup>1119</sup> *Nihon ryôiki*, transl. by Nakamura 1997: [6]/[7]

as the truth. Thus, the anecdotes, the purpose of which was to criticize sinful pleasures, became a source of wrong, as they openly promoted bad language and lying as a way to portray the said sin.

In the end, it could be concluded that all abovementioned works strived to put the last female ruler of Nara Japan in a certain mould which would be accepted by society. While historical sources and modern scientific literature tried to maintain the notion of the “character development” of Kôken/Shôtoku by depicting her first and second reign in a different way, more satirical works such as the setsuwa stories adopted a more radical approach and tried to point out her moral sins in an attempt to use her as an example for the people. In that train of thought, it is interesting that the most important historical source in regard to the life and the two reigns of that female ruler, Shoku Nihongi, remained more or less objective in its portrayal. As the work was compiled during the reign of Emperor Kanmu, who belonged to the Tenji line of the Imperial House, it could be assumed that the sovereign would have benefitted from the negative portrayal of a female ruler from the opposite Tenmu (Kusakabe) line. Instead, one finds a relatively objective narrative which describes Kôken/Shôtoku not as a woman or a female ruler but simply as one among many other Japanese emperors. Here, it should be noted that the description of the last female ruler of Nara Japan in Shoku Nihongi could be divided into two parts: the authors’ portrayal of the female sovereign and the image which she created for herself by the means of her Imperial edicts. Moreover, the tendency which could be found in other sources to create a different image of Emperor Kôken and Emperor Shôtoku could not be fully recognized here. As a result, one finds a neutral-to-positive Shoku Nihongi narrative, a course only briefly interrupted in the second part of the chronicle of Shôtoku’s death where it could be read that *“For that reason, the future generations spoke of the Emperor with hatred and portrayed her with prejudice.”*<sup>1120</sup> *“That reason”* stated in the sentence is Dôkyô’s continuous abuse of power, his inadequate politics and his harsh punishments. While one could regard those words as criticism of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, the structure of the whole record creates another impression: that of “the good ruler Shôtoku betrayed by the bad monk Dôkyô who abused the power entrusted to him by his ruler”. Thus, Shoku Nihongi creates a portrayal according to which Emperor Shôtoku had been a good and compassionate sovereign whose failures could have been attributed to the disloyalty of her subjects. In any case, the chronicles of the reigns of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku clearly showed that the emperor’s contemporaries were relatively objective in their assessment of her rule. Interestingly enough, namely Nihonshoki’s continuation sets the beginning of the negative portrayal of Dôkyô as a manipulative and corrupt person who abused the authority entrusted to him by his sovereign. As it would be seen, later sources also adopted the same strategy in matters regarding the monk minister.

The initial image of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku as a capable ruler who, despite the social limitations put on her by society due to her gender, could hold her ground against the male courtiers and her political enemies could be reconfirmed after the analysis of the Imperial edicts of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. In them, one sees an intelligent woman and a cunning politician who purposefully created many faces depending on the people and the circumstances around her. At first, she was the naïve and benevolent ruler who eventually had been betrayed by her own courtiers. After the Tachibana no Naramaro’s conspiracy was revealed, however, that mask was not needed anymore and Kôken put on the “face” of the uncompromising and harsh ruler who was ready to take action against those who attacked her first. The year of Emperor Kôken’s abdication in favor of the future Emperor Junnin probably remains the most controversial period in the two reigns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Considering the smart way in which the emperor took care of the conspirators around Tachibana no Naramaro, the argumentation that Empress Dowager Kômyôshi’s poor health was the only reason for her abdication seems insufficient and implausible. Since there are no other explanations given in her

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<sup>1120</sup> See 続日本紀 [Shoku Nihongi], 宝亀 [Hôki] 1.8.17

last edict as sitting emperor, however, one could only speculate that she was probably pressured by Fujiwara no Nakamaro into stepping down in favor of Crown Prince Ôi. Nevertheless, the constant oppression by Junnin, Nakamaro, and even her own mother could not break her. She continued to fight against her political enemies even after Kômyôshi's death in 760 when she was isolated and politically pressured on all sides. At that time, it was the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who happened to be her only support and thus helped her to find the inner strength to oppose Junnin and Nakamaro. After her reascension to the throne, Emperor Shôtoku put on a new disguise: that of the decisive and ruthless sovereign who would punish her enemies without hesitation. However, the image of an unforgiving ruler was not enough to justify the reascension of a woman who also dethroned the previous emperor on her way to the throne. Thus, she deliberately created the image of the cunning politician who was ready to utilize Dôkyô and his brother Kiyohito as a counterbalance to the Fujiwara influence at court in order to ensure her own position. At the same time, she independently assumed the role of a ruler who relied on auspicious omens as a justification tool for her political decisions, and thus deliberately showed her enemies a supposed weakness which they could exploit. The fruits of that strategy were first the conspiracy of the emperor's half sister Fuwa and then the infamous Dôkyô Incident, both from 769. In both cases, the last female ruler of Nara Japan was able to show her insight and deep understanding of the political world, which only helped to strengthen the initial image created by the Shoku Nihongi chronicles.

The waka collection Manyôshû also showed the self-portrayal of Kôken/Shôtoku. As it could be seen from a poem composed by her in order to wish Fujiwara Ason no Kiyokawa and Ôtomo Sukune no Komaro dispatched as envoys to China in 750 a safe journey, the emperor expressed her pride in her position as a ruler and High Priest of the indigenous Japanese religion. A second poem composed upon Koken's arrival at Fujiwara no Nakamaro's Tamura no miya on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of Tenpyô hôji 1 (757) together with her mother Empress Dowager Kômyôshi shows her sharp intelligence and political cunning. The emperor portrayed herself as a smart person who would not let herself be easily deceived or attacked by others. To summarize, Emperor Kôken's poems portray an intelligent person who was proud of her identity as a sovereign of the country, and a strong-willed woman who would not let herself be manipulated or used by others, which only continues the tendency seen in Shoku Nihongi.

Anyway, the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku throughout the centuries had not been confined only to historical sources or satirical texts. In the Edo period, for example, handscrolls on a sexual theme were a popular entertainment for nobles and commoners alike. Thus, they were considered a perfect tool for the transmission of ideas and informations to the people. That seemed to also have been the case with the handscroll series "Kôken-tei no monko Yuge no Dôkyô kensei no zu" (孝謙帝の門子弓削の道鏡憲政の図; Depiction of the rule of Yuge no Dôkyô, the monk [supported by] Emperor Kôken) painted by Utagawa Hiroshige III in 1865 which depicts a phallic contest at the court of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku. The first scroll from the series shows a competition among priests, male commoners and courtiers, with court ladies watching them from a distance. As soon as the event comes to an end, a group of men and women starts an orgy depicted in a peculiar and rather humoristic way. The third scroll concentrates on the difference in the condition between men and women as the orgy goes on. While the men are portrayed utterly exhausted by the activity, the women are showed as energetic as ever. Furthermore, one sees a woman who receives a reward, apparently for her sexual prowess. While Hiroshige's art uses the supposed relationship between Shôtoku and Dôkyô as its basis, it could be assumed that the artist's intention was far from ridiculing it. He rather used it as a springboard in order to emphasize the importance of the women for society, as well as their inner and outer strengths which could potentially surpass those of the men. Considering Emperor Shôtoku's

depiction in the composition, it could be speculated that Hiroshige's intention was to portray the female emperor as the embodiment of female supremacy. After all, she had been a woman and an emperor: on the one hand, she belonged to the stronger gender (that much could be assumed upon observing the third scroll), and on the other hand, she occupied the highest political position in the country. At the same time, apparently Hiroshige neither supported the theory about the love affair between Shôtoku and Dôkyô nor directly denied it. The emperor's role is confined to that of a witness to the whole event and of a person of authority who rewards the winner in the competition. Instead of portraying her as a participant in the orgy, the author decided to present her simply as the guest of honor whose only duty was to reward the winner after the end of the event. At the same time, it seems that Hiroshige saw Dôkyô as an immoral person and therefore decided to present him as the main organizer and supporter of sinful events at court. From that point of view, however, it could also easily be concluded that Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, in one way or another, supported their organization, which would characterize her as an equally immoral woman. On the other hand, a subtle criticism could also be sensed if one considers the possibility of the last female ruler of Nara Japan not supporting those events. In that case, it would seem that the sovereign could not control Dôkyô, which in turn would support the notion of the weak woman having been controlled by her courtiers. In any case, it seems that Hiroshige continued the tendency to depict the Buddhist monk in a bad light. All things considered, it could be concluded that the shunga scrolls from the Edo period tried to give an answer to paradoxes or controversies which could not be easily explained by the official histories. As it could be seen, Hiroshige could not escape from the difficulties caused by the lack of information about certain aspects of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku's reign(s), but in contrast to the setsuwa stories, for example, he decided to leave the end assessment to the people observing the scrolls instead to express his own opinion.

In contrast to the sources mentioned above which focused on Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, some sources decided to give much more attention to the Buddhist monk Dôkyô who supposedly tried to usurp the throne in the infamous Dôkyô Incident. One such source is *Nihon kôki*, a historical source compiled in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and regarded as the official continuation of *Shoku Nihongi*. An interesting peculiarity of the chronicle of Emperor Shôtoku's reign is the choice to present the facts through the "eyes" of an Imperial subject. In the case of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku that had been Wake no Kiyomaro, the person who brought back the second Hachiman oracle from Usa and who also played a major part in the Dôkyô Incident. According to the narrative, the monk received the "favor" of the emperor but apparently that was not enough for him. After hearing the first Hachiman oracle (supposedly orchestrated by him), he saw a possibility to reach the highest position in state. Therefore, he summoned Wake no Kiyomaro and tried to earn his loyalty with promises for high positions. The narrative strongly implies that Dôkyô saw himself more than capable to ascend the throne and was therefore furious upon hearing the second Hachiman oracle brought back by Wake no Kiyomaro. Thus, he proceeded to kill Kiyomaro, but was eventually stopped by Emperor Shôtoku who "*brachte es nicht über sich, ihn zu richten.*" Thus, *Nihon kôki* continues the tendency to describe Emperor Shôtoku in a good light. The chronicle creates the image of a benevolent ruler who respected and trusted her subjects. On the other hand, however, Dôkyô is portrayed as an ambitious and greedy person who tried to usurp the throne through false oracles and brute force. Thus, *Nihon kôki* further extends the tendency first seen in *Shoku Nihongi* to portray Dôkyô as a rather immoral and villainous person whose desire for power and authority had been immeasurable.

The continuation of that trend could be clearly seen in another historical source from the Heian period, *Fusô ryakuki* compiled by monk Kôen in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In its rather thorough chronicle of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, the narrative of the Dôkyô Incident takes a central place. While Kôen's description of the incident does not deviate significantly from that found in other official histories, it lends the event

a new perspective. Thus, one reads that Dôkyô had actually been a corrupt and greedy person who was ready to do anything in order to obtain and hold onto power. He is compared to a wolf (狼; ôkami), a comparison which indicates his sinful ways in regard to women. One reads that the whole incident had actually been instigated by Dôkyô in his pursuit of ultimate power and authority. Interestingly enough, however, Fusô ryakuki doesn't criticize Emperor Shôtoku who apparently had been in poor health at the time of the incident. According to the narrative, Dôkyô could pursue his dreams only due to the weakness of the female emperor rooted in her health condition. Unable to exercise strict control over the nobility and the court, she became an easy prey for ambitious and greedy "wolves" such as the Buddhist monk. Thus, Fusô ryakuki continues the tendency to portray Emperor Shôtoku as strong and capable ruler who was eventually "defeated" not by her political opponents but rather by her own weakening body. Nevertheless, while Kôen's work does not deviate significantly from the "traditional" description of Emperor Shôtoku, it strengthens the Nihon kôki portrayal of Dôkyô as a bad and greedy person who tried anything in order to ascend the throne.

All in all, it seems that the authors of Nihon kôki and Fusô ryakuki wanted to change the perspective of the historical narrative and to portray Dôkyô as the "ultimate villain" during the second reign of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. The reason for that could be found in deeper political undercurrents flowing under the surface of the Japanese political world after the death of Emperor Shôtoku in 770. The "untypical" behavioral patterns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan such as her having been the first female Crown Prince, her dissatisfaction with her abdication and Junnin's enthronement, and eventually her forceful retaking of the throne caused certain changes in the nobles' views on how a state should be governed. While the court life during the reign of Emperor Shôtoku seemed peaceful on the surface, there were many uncertainties and dissatisfaction to be found underneath it which eventually reached their peak with the Dôkyô Incident. While there are reasons to believe that the Hachiman oracle with which the monk minister had been more or less accused of treason was orchestrated by political forces other than Dôkyô or Emperor Shôtoku herself, it was much easier for later historical sources to simply change the perspective and to portray the Buddhist monk as the "villain". If it turned out that an "untypical" female ruler such as Emperor Shôtoku wanted to break with tradition and appoint a Buddhist monk as her successor, that would have had catastrophic consequences for the Imperial House and its authority. At the same time, it was much easier to portray a subject as having been disloyal and greedy. Thus, the honor of the Imperial House would have been preserved for the generations to come. In a way, Dôkyô's figure could be compared with that of other historical personalities with similar fate. For example, the Russian mystic Grigori Rasputin was born to a peasant family, but eventually became an extremely powerful person at the Russian court as healer of the son of the last Russian emperor Nicholas II. In France, Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu, albeit a noble, could be described as having come from a humble background. Thanks to his cunning and abilities, however, he remained in history as the leading figure behind the politics of Louis XIII. While a deeper comparison between these three men would be almost impossible due to the different political circumstances in their respective countries, it should be noted that they more or less shared the same fate. They rose to power and in the process alienated the political world and the society, thus becoming a subject of envy and hate. The seemingly political inactivity of Dôkyô (his reforms seemed to have been centered mainly on religion) made him suspicious in the eyes of his political opponents who tried to utilize him in order to bring the sovereign supporting him down (in previous chapters it was mentioned that the Dôkyô Incident could have been orchestrated by Emperor Shôtoku's political enemies in an attempt to jeopardize her reputation and thus to minimize the chances of her independently choosing a successor). Rasputin, on the other hand, became drunk with the Imperial couple's reverence for him and his abilities to the point that he indulged himself in immoral and disrespectful actions, thus making it extremely difficult for them to cover up his mistakes. Last but not



least, Richelieu was too cunning and independent, thus becoming very hard to control by even the king. It could be assumed that the “untypical” behavior demonstrated by those three men became the reason, if not necessarily for their death, then for their negative portrayal in some historical sources.

All things considered, it could be assumed that the “untypicality” of historical figures such as Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku and Dōkyō had an impact on their description. At the same time, however, the inconsistency in the portrayal of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku strongly influenced modern sources and historical novels in their interpretation of history. Thus, one sees the rather bold description of the supposed love story between the emperor and her Buddhist monk delivered by Sakaguchi Angō in his book “Dōkyō”. According to it, the relationship between Shōtoku and Dōkyō had been as one between a husband and a wife, with the monk having supposedly been the only person who was able to see through the female emperor’s Imperial façade and to understand the woman hiding beneath the surface. He, on the other hand, was supposedly fascinated by the duality in her – during the day she was the strong ruler carrying the burden of the state affairs on her shoulders, while at night she was a woman with a female body and soul. At the same time, however, it is strongly implied that despite the emperor’s awareness of the sinful nature of their relationship, she was not able to prevent it. As it could be seen, Sakaguchi Angō strongly emphasized the idea of a love relationship between Emperor Shōtoku and Dōkyō and presented it in a most realistic and romantic way.

Another untraditional reading of Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku’s reigns could be found in Joan R. Piggott’s essay “The last classical female sovereign. Kōken-Shōtoku Tennō”, a part of the book “Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan” by Dorothy Ko. In it, the author strongly opposes the idea that “*In the English historiography the end of female sovereignty has been explained by Shōtoku’s relationship with Dōkyō and Dōkyō’s purported determination to usurp the throne.*”<sup>1121</sup> and defends the opinion that Kōken/Shōtoku had been a strong and independent ruler who wasn’t afraid to make difficult political decisions when such were needed. In contrast to other narratives of the last female ruler of Nara Japan, Piggott expresses the view that the abdication of Emperor Kōken in 758 in favor of Crown Prince Ōi was actually caused by the bloodshed which followed the conspiracy of Tachibana no Naramaro. Presenting that idea, the author indirectly draws certain parallels between Kōken and another female ruler, Emperor Kōgyoku, who also abdicated as a result of the assassination of Soga no Iruka at the hands of her son and heir Prince Naka no Ōe. Interestingly enough, both rulers reascended the throne in a later period of their lives, the former as Emperor Shōtoku, the latter as Emperor Saimei. However, apart from the fact that both rulers were women and that they reascended the throne, there are hardly any other similarities between them. Kōgyoku/Saimei could be described as “throneholder”, both during her first and second reign, while Kōken/Shōtoku proved that she did not fit in that category neither during her first nor during her second rule. From that point of view, even the vague possibility of comparing the emperors Kōken and Kōgyoku in the way of and the reason for their abdication seems too brave and most certainly untraditional. Another interesting peculiarity to be found in Joan Piggott’s essay is her view that Emperor Kōken/Shōtoku’s life and rule had been strongly influenced by the Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. In that train of thought, the appointment of Imperial Princess Abe as Crown Prince and her ascension as the rightful successor of her father Emperor Shōmu was regarded as an anomaly which in one way or another influenced the society’s views on her as a person and a ruler. According to Piggott, the break with the Confucian teachings and the Ritsuryō codes embodied by Kōken/Shōtoku combined with the turbulent events during the two reigns of the last female ruler of Nara Japan contributed greatly to her negative portrayal in some sources.

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<sup>1121</sup> Piggott 2003: 65

Last but not least comes the rather negative, and certainly untraditional, portrayal found in the essay “Japanische Herscherinnen” by Ulrich Pauly. The author fully supports the idea strongly denied by Joan Piggott that “...the end of female sovereignty [was caused] by Shôtoku’s relationship with Dôkyô and Dôkyô’s purported determination to usurp the throne.” Moreover, Pauly expresses the view that the change of the capital during the reign of Emperor Kanmu was caused namely by the love affair between the emperor and the Buddhist monk. However, there are several arguments which speak against the said opinion. Firstly, the change of the capital was an old practice in the Imperial House which supposedly brought good luck to the new sovereign. In later times, it symbolized the emperor’s power and the stability of his government. From that point of view, Kanmu’s decision to change the capital could be seen as both his intention to bring himself “good luck”, and as a way to establish his own seat of power. Of course, as an old capital which served several emperors, Nara had become a stable base for the Buddhist clergy, and Shôtoku’s support of Dôkyô only contributed to its influence and power, but it would be strongly exaggerated to hold a single ruler responsible for an event which was in development at least since the reign of Emperor Shômu. From that point of view, Pauly’s decision to attribute the change of the capital to the supposed sexual relationship between Emperor Shôtoku and Dôkyô seems definitely untraditional. Some figures of speech used by Ulrich Pauly in his essay seem “borrowed” from the setsuwa stories which, as it was discussed, were not renowned for their objective presentation of historical facts.

All in all, it could be argued that the portrayal of all historical figures is strongly influenced by different factors such as the political tendencies and the cultural developments in the country at the time of the compilation of the written source, personality traits displayed by the said historical figure through his/her actions, and, as it could be seen in some modern sources, even by the excess or the lack of information about that figure. In the case of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, it could be said that her objective portrayal began and ended with Shoku Nihongi, the source which also contained the most of her personal thoughts and actions expressed in her Imperial edicts. From that point on, any other source in one way or another deviated from the objectivity in its portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Some of them divided both her two reigns and her personality, thus giving her the so-called “character development” from a naïve and demure woman put on the throne by her father Emperor Shômu to a strong and independent ruler. Other sources decided to concentrate their efforts on certain aspects of her two reigns about which there was lacking information in the official histories, and thus to express their view on those events. From a historical and political point of view, the most important matter during the two reigns of Kôken/Shôtoku had undeniably been the Dôkyô Incident. Interestingly enough, however, the whole event had not been thoroughly covered in any historical narrative. Some details were left unexplained, which left room for speculation and interpretation. Thus, the story about the love affair between the last female ruler of Nara Japan and her monk minister was born and further developed with narratives of the sexual side of their relationship. Modern authors even tried to romanticize the story by describing the moral turmoils of both Dôkyô and Shôtoku who supposedly knew that their relationship was sinful, but simply could not put an end to it. That interpretation left room for the critics to judge the abilities and the personality of the female sovereign, and to accuse her of having been a bad ruler and a naïve woman. Other people turned their negative sentiments against Dôkyô and described him as power-hungry and manipulative. Another such controversial event had been Emperor Kôken’s abdication in 758. Considering the later developments, one could hardly accept the poor health of Empress Dowager Kômyôshi as the one and only reason for Kôken’s decision to step down in favor of Crown Prince Ôi who became Emperor Junnin. The case is, however, that neither Shoku Nihongi nor any other source gives a different explanation for the emperor’s abdication, thus leaving room for speculation. As a result, the circumstances behind Kôken’s stepping down from the throne became another matter often discussed by authors and historians,

ranking only second after the Dôkyô Incident. Some authors decided to extend the notion of filial piety which Kôken showed toward her father Emperor Shômu to the Empress Dowager. Others even portrayed the last female ruler of Nara Japan as a caring daughter who loved her mother so much that she became devastated after her death. A third type of authors decided to delve deeper into the political situation of the country during that period. They developed the theory that it was highly likely that Fujiwara no Nakamaro pressured his cousin into stepping down, as he assumed that Crown Prince Ôi would be much easier to control (as it actually turned out to have been the case). In any case, the portrayal of Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku is (almost) never one-sided and absolutely biased. Even Jinnô shôtoki – the most critical historical source regarding her two reigns and politics – does not express direct criticism of her. In most cases, certain ideas are hinted through phrases, forms of speech or single words, but they are eventually left to the reader to interpret according to his or her own understanding. There is no case in which a general conclusion is drawn or the author's opinion is imposed on the reader. The same could not be said about some Western sources which openly criticize Emperor Kôken/Shôtoku and portray her in a bad light. While it is true that such sources are rare, it is also a fact that they still exist and could heavily influence the way in which the Western readers see the last female ruler of Nara Japan. Here, it should be pointed out that these critical works are the result of the use of a limited range of historical sources, which made it difficult for their authors to present all aspects of the emperor's life and two reigns. While a scientific work based on insufficient historical sources is a danger in and of itself, it could be used as a reminder to always try to delve deeper and to never forget to observe even the smallest details when trying to analyze an important historical figure such as Kôken/Shôtoku. Anyway, the positive and negative narratives combined serve to create the full image of the last female ruler of Nara Japan: a person, a daughter, a woman, and above all an emperor who was capable enough to ascend the throne not once but twice, and left many notable political decisions and events to scholars and historians to analyze and to assess. All in all, by utilizing old and modern, positive and negative, objective and subjective narratives, the current work was able to achieve its purpose: to not only describe the (changes in the) portrayal of the last female ruler of Nara Japan but also to critically assess these descriptions and to analyze the reasons hiding behind them. Thus, it commended the objectivity there where it was present (but not at all expected), for example, in Shoku Nihongi or in Utagawa Hiroshige III's handscroll series "Kôken-tei no monko Yuge no Dôkyô kensei no zu" (孝謙帝の門子弓削の道鏡憲政の図; Depiction of the rule of Yuge no Dôkyô, the monk [supported by] Emperor Kôken), but also strongly criticized the biased and subjective narratives of Nihon ryôiki, Kojidan or Ulrich Pauly. Last but not least the current work did not forget the positive presentation of the last female ruler of Nara Japan such as that found in Fusô ryakuki, in Takinami Sadako's 最後の女帝孝謙天皇 (Saigo no jotei Kôken tennô; Kôken-tennô: the last female emperor), or in Sakaguchi Ango's 道鏡("Dôkyô") and 道鏡童子 ("Dôkyô-dôji"). Even in that case, however, that portrayal was assessed and criticism was expressed there where the author's pursuit of positive description neglected the facts and attempted to change the historical truth. Considering the range of the current work, it could serve as a guide to the person, woman and emperor Kôken/Shôtoku, as well as to her portrayal throughout the ages for anyone who wants to read and learn more about the last female ruler of Nara Japan.

APPENDIX

Dôkyô chôhō no zu [道鏡寵奉之図]



Figure 9. *Dôkyô chôhō no zu*, detail. Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University, hayBKE6-0013.

In: Yano: 74

Kôken-tei no monko Yuge no Dôkyô kensei no zu [孝謙帝の門子弓削の道鏡憲政の図]



View 1



View 2



View 3



View 4

## Changes in the Bureaucratic Nomenclature during the Nakamaro Supremacy

Daijōkan 太政官 – Great Council of State	Genjōkan 乾政官 – Heavenly Council of State
Shibi Chūdai 紫微中台 – Dowager Empress' Household	Kongūkan 坤宮官 – Earthly Palace Council
Nakatsukasashō 中務省 – Ministry of Central Affairs	Shinbushō 信部省 – Ministry of Fidelity
Shikibushō 式部省 – Ministry of Ceremonial	Monbushō 文部省 – Ministry of Civil Affairs
Jibushō 治部省 – Ministry of Civil Administration	Reibushō 礼部省 – Ministry of Rites
Minbushō 民部省 – Ministry of Popular Affairs	Ninbushō 仁部省 – Ministry of Benevolence
Hyōbushō 兵部省 – Ministry of War	Mubushō 武部省 – Ministry of Military Affairs
Gyōbushō 刑部省 – Ministry of Righteousness	Gibushō 義部省 - Ministry of Righteousness
Ōkurashō 大藏省 – Ministry of the Treasury	Setsubushō 節部省 – Ministry of Moderation
Kunaishō 宮内省 – Ministry of the Imperial Household	Chibushō 智部省 – Ministry of Wisdom

In: Bender 2021: 83/84



Hyakumantô darani



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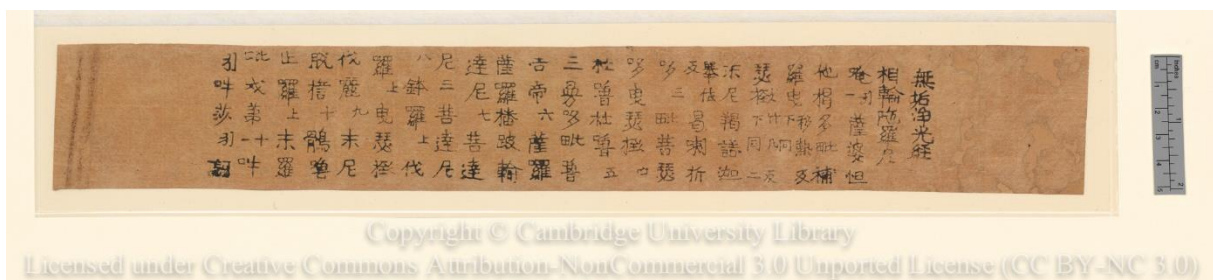
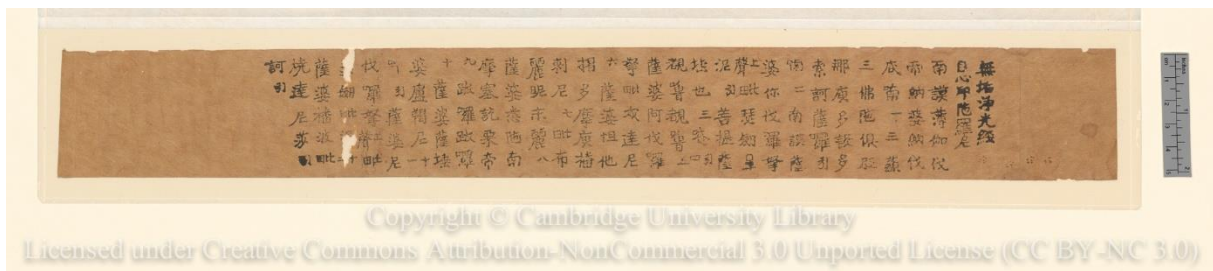




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Physical Location: Cambridge University Library

Alternative Title(s): 無垢淨光陀羅尼經 (Mukujōkō darani-kyō); Buddhist invocations of the one million pagodas

Uniform Title: 百万塔陀羅尼

Subject(s): Buddhism

Origin Place: Hōryū-ji 法隆寺 (Hōryū-ji Temple), Japan

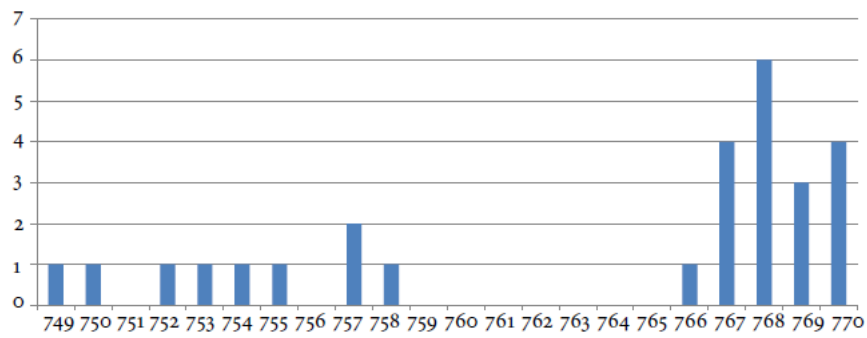
Date of Creation: 764-770 (天平宝宇 8 – 宝龜 1)

Language(s): Chinese

Former Owner(s): Ceadel, Eric B.

Extent: Jishin'in darani 自心印陀羅尼 (short): 5.8 X 46.6 cm, Jishin'in darani 自心印陀羅尼 (long): 5.5 X 42.3 cm, Sōrin darani 相輪陀羅尼 (short): 5.6 X 40.2 cm, Konpon darani 根本陀羅尼 (long): 5.7 X 56.3 cm.

## Auspicious omens, 749 – 770



GRAPH 2. Auspicious omens, 749–770.

unusual clouds	6
white tortoise	5
white crow	4
unusual writing	3
gold	2
white deer	2
white pheasant	2
sacred relic	1
divine horse	1
white rodent	1
white dove	1
white sparrow	1

TABLE 3. Frequency of auspicious omens, 749–770.

In: Bender (a) 2013: 59

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