AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

日本文化入門

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Preface

The present volume consists of nine essays comprising a brief history of Japan and nine topical essays on selected aspects of Japanese civilization. Of course, it was not possible to devote a separate essay to every major area of Japanese culture and undoubtedly there can be differences of opinion as to which are the best areas to include in a book like this and which can be omitted. Still, the reader will find that most of the more important aspects, if not given a full chapter in themselves, are touched upon in one place or another. However, Japanese thought was deliberately not accorded a coverage proportionate to its importance, for it was anticipated that the present volume could be supplemented in this respect by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, compilers, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition,* Columbia University Press, New York, 1958.

This book is meant to be an introduction to Japanese civilization for lower division college students. Portions of the work were prepared under a contract with the United States Office of Education for the production of texts to be used in undergraduate education. Each contributor was asked to present the facts and concepts indispensable to a beginner's informed understanding of the assigned topic. With that as a guide, each was given complete freedom to develop his presentation as he saw fit. Inevitably this has led to some structural differences among chapters, but it has also assured the reader a variety of viewpoints and approaches.

Special thanks are due Hugo Munsterberg for selecting and securing the art illustrations.

A. E. T.

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

Japanese words and names have been transcribed in this book according to the Hepburn system of Romanization. Japanese names are given in the Japanese order, with the family name first and the personal name second.

Vowels in Japanese can be pronounced approximately as follows:

a	as in	arm
i	as the first e in	eve
u	as in	rude
e	as the a in	chaotic
o	as in	old

Consonants can be pronounced roughly as in English (g is always hard) with the exception of r, which is rendered like the unrolled r of Spanish. A Japanese syllable usually consists of either a consonant + vowel or a simple vowel. Long marks or macrons over u and o (ū, ō) require that the sound be held for twice its normal duration. (In this book macrons have been omitted from geographic names and from Japanese words, like shogun, which have been acclimatized in English.) Since there are no true diphthongs in Japanese, two vowels occurring together should be pronounced as separate syllables. For example, the word *kai* is pronounced in two syllables ka-i. When two consonants appear together, always remembering that ts, ch, and sh are symbols for single consonants, the first consonant is sustained as a full syllable. The same holds true for an n serving in any capacity other than the initial consonant of a consonant-vowel syllable. In ambiguous cases an apostrophe is frequently placed after the n to show that it is to be disjoined from the following vowel. Thus *hokku* would be ho-k-ku, *nembutsu* would be ne-m-bu-tsu, Kan'ami would be Ka-n-a-mi. An exception to this, however, is y. When y appears between a consonant and a vowel, it is not given full value but blends lightly with the preceding consonant and the succeeding vowel so that all three form one syllable. For instance, the Kyu of Kyushu is pronounced like the English word cue.

Based on H. Paul Varley, *A Syllabus of Japanese Civilization*, 2d edition (New York, 1972), p. 91.

Contents

PART ONE
The History of Japan

PART TWO
Aspects of Japanese Civilization

AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

PART ONE

The History of Japan

日本文化入門

I

Early Japan

BY

H. PAUL VARLEY

Prehistory: The Jōmon and Yayoi Cultures

Japan's position just off Asia has often been compared to that of England near the northwestern coast of Europe. Both countries have enjoyed a protective insularity in relation to their respective continents. For both, invasion has been infrequent in historic times. In Japan's case, the only large-scale armed intrusions before World War II were the unsuccessful invasions by the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

Yet in at least two important respects the English and Japanese situations have differed. First, England is far closer to the coast of France (about 20 miles) than Japan is to Korea (about 115 miles); and the English have from earliest times played an active role in continental affairs. Isolation, in short, has been a much more significant fact of life for the Japanese. Second, whereas England's Europe evolved into a continent of diverse peoples and states, East Asia has traditionally been dominated by the pervasive culture of China. The Japanese of premodern times were largely restricted to the Chinese sphere in their foreign relations and in their opportunities for cultural borrowing. Until recent centuries, contacts with the outside world were made almost exclusively through China or through Korea, the latter a country far more fully within China's cultural orbit than Japan.

Geographic isolation has undoubtedly been one of the most important determinants in the shaping of Japanese history. Remote in their island kingdom, the Japanese have ever been acutely conscious of the differences between themselves and outsiders. Their aggressive phase of foreign expansion in the recent past should not be allowed to obscure the fact that noninvolvement in overseas activities has been a far more frequent policy guide for Japanese governments through the ages. Moreover, the relative absence of outside military threat has tended to make evolution a more characteristic process in Japan's historical development than either social or political revolution. The Japanese have been cultural borrowers, from China in premodern times and from the West during the past century. They have taken eagerly from others those things they have found appealing or useful. Yet Japan's cultural borrowing, apparently indiscriminate at times, has usually proven in the long run to be highly selective, and the resultant advances in its civilization have usually been more the product of synthesis than outright imitation.

In some remote geological age the Japanese islands were connected by land to the Asian mainland. Proof of this has been provided by

discovery of the fossilized bones of elephants and other continental mammals no longer indigenous to Japan. These animals apparently wandered or migrated to Japan during a time when the climate of Asia was far different from what it is today. In a later epoch the coastal land area that was to become Japan sank below the ocean and still later, after several violent shifts of the earth's surface, it reemerged as an archipelago in roughly the geographic configuration that we know it today.

Until very recently archaeologists believed that the origins of human habitation in Japan postdated substantially the formation of the country into an island chain. Man seemed, in fact, to have been quite a latecomer, not appearing on Japanese soil until perhaps 4000–3000 B.C. The best hypothesis was that this "first arriver" came from northeast Asia, perhaps through the Korean Peninsula. His culture was already advanced, since he was the possessor of polished stone tools and the maker of a sophisticated and highly artistic style of clay pottery.

Then late in the 1940s dramatic finds were made at Iwajuku north of Tokyo. From a stratum of the earth considerably below that which contained the earliest previous human remains were extracted the rough, chipped-stone tools of an obviously much older culture. Within a decade or so several hundred paleolithic, or old stone age, sites had been uncovered from Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the southwest and the archaeological frontiers of Japanese history were pushed back to a vastly more ancient time. So far, only the stone tools and implements of paleolithic man have been found: there are no known skeletal remains (apart from a few bone chips) or other signs of his physical or cultural presence. Nevertheless the evidence on hand is sufficient to suggest that man may have inhabited Japan as long ago as many tens and perhaps even hundreds of thousands of years. It is possible that he, like the prehistoric animals, came first by foot to Japan when it was still attached to the Asian mainland. If so, he may have been directly related to the earliest humans of the north China plain, one of the cradles of mankind and of civilization in East Asia.

Greater knowledge of paleolithic man must await future research and, let us hope, discovery. The remains of Japan's first neolithic culture, on the other hand, have been steadily unearthed, studied, and classified for nearly a century. This earliest neolithic culture is known as the Jōmon or "rope-pattern" culture from the rope-like

designs which its people either incised or impressed into their clay pottery. Modern scientific techniques of measuring the age of archaeological materials have helped to revise the date of the beginning of Jōmon culture in Japan from the 4000–3000 B.C. figure mentioned above, which was generally accepted before the Pacific War, to around 8000 B.C.

Jōmon culture lasted in Japan from approximately 8000 until 300 B.C. and during this long age evolved through a number of stages. Its pottery, which was made by hand without a potter's wheel, is extraordinarily varied, with types and surface designs differing according to both time and place of construction. Typical pieces of early Jōmon pottery have bottoms like bullet or projectile heads and were apparently pushed into the earth or sand to make them stand upright; later types, on the other hand, tend to be much more elaborate and even bizarre, often having widely flared and ornately formed sides and rims.

The Jōmon people, whose sites have been found principally in the northern and eastern regions of the country, hunted animals and gathered roots, nuts, and berries. They also had canoes and were rather skillful coastal and even deep-sea fishermen. They lived at first in caves and later in shallow pit dwellings, each of a size (about two feet deep and about fifteen feet in diameter) sufficient to accommodate a family of four or five. Among the most prominent features of their settlements, which they usually occupied only briefly, were huge refuse piles or "kitchen mounds" composed mainly of the remains of shellfish, a food they apparently consumed with voracious appetite.

We have no way of knowing at this time the relationship, if any, between Jōmon man and his paleolithic predecessor. The Jōmon people may have immigrated as newcomers to Japan, but no one has been able to say with any certainty when and from just where. Perhaps they came in waves from different directions: from the north, via the islands of Sakhalin and Hokkaido; from Korea to Kyushu; or from Southeast Asia or the South Seas by a process of "island-hopping." The last suggestion is particularly intriguing. In historical times the route from Korea to northwestern Kyushu has been the most important means of entry into Japan. Yet there is a quite distinct "southern element" in Japanese culture that is not likely to have come from that direction. Certain Shintō myths, for example, are remarkably similar to those of Indonesia, New Zealand, and other

island countries of the South Pacific, while early marriage customs and architectural styles are like the customs and styles of Polynesia.

Sometime around 300 B.C. Jōmon culture began to be displaced by a new culture, called Yayoi from the site in present-day Tokyo where its remains were first found. The Yayoi people used polished stone tools, wove cloth, and produced, with the aid of a potter's wheel and with a better firing technique, a technologically more advanced, although perhaps artistically less satisfying, type of pottery than that fashioned by the Jōmon people. In addition, the Yayoi people practiced agriculture and knew the use of metals.

There are, however, nearly as many unanswered questions about the transition from Jōmon to Yayoi as about the shift from paleolithic to Jōmon cultures. The tendency among Japanese scholars today is to stress the similarities between late Jōmon and early Yayoi and to hypothesize that in the former age the way had already been partially prepared for the introduction of the culture of the latter. Some scholars point out, for example, that late Jōmon man seems already to have had knowledge of a primitive kind of agriculture. Even if this were so, its importance in terms of socio-economic change should not be overestimated. The extensive adoption of agriculture and the establishment of farming villages would lead us to expect the emergence of new property-holding and social class distinctions. In fact, larger and more permanent settlements did appear in late Jōmon times; but the continuing general uniformity in the size of Jōmon pit dwellings and burial chambers indicates that, if property-holding and class distinctions arose, they were slight indeed.

Perhaps more fundamental in considering the transition from Jōmon to Yayoi is the question of how Yayoi culture originally came to Japan. It was once widely believed that the Yayoi people, whose sites are principally in the west and east, came to Kyushu from the continent (via Korea) and moved gradually into Honshu. One theory linked their arrival in Japan with the unification of China under the Ch'in and Han dynasties during the third century B.C. The theory was that the completion of the great wall of China caused migratory tribes in north Asia to move east and south through Manchuria and Korea and eventually to Japan. In the process of migration these people supposedly acquired some of the culture and technology, especially agriculture, of the Chinese.

Although there are ample grounds for dissent, the inclination among scholars at present is to reject the idea that there was any

substantial "invasion" or migration such as this and to view Yayoi as essentially an important new set of cultural and technological advances on the continent which the Jōmon people adopted for themselves. This view is especially plausible in light of the later historical distinction which the Japanese earned for their capacity to adopt, voluntarily and in wholesale fashion; the superior cultures of others.

The development of agriculture during the Yayoi period (*ca.* 300 B.C.–A.D. 300) had profound and lasting effects on the course of Japanese civilization. Permanent farming villages were founded and grew in size. It became possible and desirable to accumulate wealth in the form of land and stored grain. The need for cooperative effort in tending fields and sharing available facilities gave rise to new kinds of organization. The family in particular became a more tightly knit economic as well as social unit; and above the family level increasingly larger communities made their appearance. Whereas a typical Jōmon settlement may have consisted of a relatively few households, some Yayoi communities contained a hundred or more.

The agriculture adopted by the Japanese in the early Yayoi period was the wet-rice culture of central and south China. This kind of agriculture requires a heavy input of human labor and has, until recent times, made of the mass of the Japanese people a highly sedentary farming society. Such a society tends to inculcate a strong sense of hierarchy with its stress on obedience: of children to parents, of younger to older brothers, of followers to superiors. And indeed the history of the Japanese until the modern era has to a great extent been governed by an acute consciousness of the gradations of status ascribed by birth.

Yet in at least one important way Japan has developed agriculturally quite differently from China. In China the need to undertake massive public works to control the distribution of water on a large scale for agricultural purposes has been a crucial factor in the tendency toward highly centralized "despotic" government. A similar need for truly massive public works has never existed in Japan. Water is, for the most part, abundant and evenly distributed by short, fast rivers and streams. There are no great water systems such as that of the Yellow River, which dominates the north China plain. Political and social control has been far more important on the local or regional, rather than the national, level. Hence, strong central government (to say nothing of despotism) has not been a conspicuous feature of Japanese society until modern times.

In addition to advances in agriculture, the use of metals also stimulated the rapid development of Japanese civilization during the Yayoi period. Since bronze and iron were both introduced virtually simultaneously from the continent, Japan did not have a true bronze age. Iron became the material for everyday use, while bronze was employed largely in the making of ceremonial and ornamental objects. By the mid-Yayoi age the Japanese had abandoned stone and were making their agricultural tools exclusively of wood and iron. They were, moreover, experimenting with new types of grain and moving outward from low-lying wetlands to other farming areas where they were obliged to evolve more complex methods of irrigation. Late Yayoi sites show the remains of highly developed systems of irrigated paddy fields as well as extensive storage facilities which attest that material accumulation, at least on the village level, was considerably advanced by the second and third centuries A.D.

There were three principal cultural areas in Japan during mid- and late Yayoi times: an area in northern Kyushu distinguished by the variety of bronze objects found in its burial sites, including coins and ornamental mirrors of Chinese Han dynasty origin and Korean-made spears, swords, and halberds; another area in the central provinces of Honshu in which innumerable bronze bells have been discovered scattered about; and, finally, a more remote area in the Kanto where no significant bronze findings have been made. The bronze bells of the central provinces are a great curiosity and, indeed, a mystery. Ranging in height from about five inches to four feet, these elongated objects are usually heavily ornamented both with abstract designs and with crudely sketched pictures of animals, houses, boats, people performing farming chores, men hunting with bow and arrow, and so on. Nobody has been able to explain their use (they are not functional as bells) or why they were apparently so indiscriminately discarded or left lying about by their owners. Perhaps they were used in certain religious rituals of which we no longer have knowledge or possibly they served as symbols of tribal headship. In any case production of them ceased abruptly in the early fourth century when the cultures of northern Kyushu and the central provinces began to merge.

Chinese Accounts of Early Japan

Our knowledge of Japan in the latter half of the Yayoi period—that is, during the first three centuries A.D.—is not restricted to the archaeological record. Valuable information is contained also in the contemporary dynastic histories of China. The entries in these histories concerning Japan, which the Chinese chroniclers made in the sections devoted to barbarian affairs, give us clues to aspects of early Japanese society about which we would otherwise be quite ignorant.

The Chinese called Japan the land of Wa (a name which they wrote with the character for "stunted" or "dwarfed") and recorded that about the beginning of the first century A.D. Wa was divided into a hundred "countries." Although we may hypothesize that these countries were in fact only tribal groupings, we have no way of knowing whether they numbered precisely one hundred or whether the character "hundred" was intended to mean "a myriad." Moreover, it is impossible to determine their distribution. Were they all concentrated in northern Kyushu around Hakata, the nearest stopping point from the continent, or were they spread over other parts of the country, perhaps as distant as the Kansai?

In the year A.D. 57 an official group representing the countries of Wa journeyed to China and was received in audience by Emperor Kuang-wu, the founder of the Later Han dynasty (A.D. 25–220), who presented it with a golden seal. More than seventeen hundred years later, in 1784, a seal matching the description of the one presented by Kuang-wu was found by a farmer in a field near Hakata. Not all scholars accept its authenticity, but for some this seal has been an important factor in confirming the general reliability of the accounts of Japan in the Chinese dynastic histories.

During the second century A.D. there appears to have been widespread disorder in Wa. Perhaps this disorder was part of a process of political consolidation made possible by rapid technological advances in agriculture and metallurgy. Whatever the case, we are told in the Chinese histories that by the following century the number of countries of Wa had been reduced to thirty and had come under the general hegemony of a queen named Pimiko (or Himiko). An especially detailed description of the land of Wa and its queen during the early third century is contained in the *History of the Kingdom of Wei* which was compiled sometime around 297. From the observations of the Wei history we learn, among other things, that

the people of Wa ate raw vegetables and went around barefooted; they covered their graves with earthen mounds and practiced scapulimancy as a means of divination; they clapped their hands in worship; and they conveyed messages either squatting or kneeling with both hands on the ground. Even these few entries illustrate the value of the Wei history in casting light on the origins and antiquity of certain later Japanese customs and practices. Clapping hands in worship, for example, is still common at Shintō shrines; and the covering of graves with earthen mounds presumably led to the construction of gigantic earthen tumuli in the Tomb period (discussed below). In matters of etiquette, kneeling on the ground bent almost double remains today the most deferential posture that a Japanese can assume.

Pimiko, who lived in the Wa country of Yamatai, seems to have been more of a religious than a political leader. Although advanced in years, she was unmarried and remained in guarded seclusion, where she engaged in magic and sorcery, and "bewitched" the people while her younger brother handled actual matters of administration. The temptation is strong to connect Pimiko's role as a kind of shaman or high priestess, who communicated with the gods on behalf of her people, with the origins of the most sacred ritual function of the Japanese sovereign in later historic times. Yet apparently Pimiko's personal charisma was also an important factor in maintaining Yamatai's control over Wa about the mid-third century, for after her death there was at least a temporary return to disorder.

The location of Yamatai is one of the most vexing problems in Japanese historiography. The Wei history contains explicit instructions on how to travel from Korea to Yamatai. But, although they direct us smoothly enough across the Korean Straits to Kyushu, these instructions then call for a sharp turn southward that leads ultimately through Kyushu and into the Pacific Ocean. Reluctant to dismiss the Wei instructions as utterly worthless, Japanese scholars have argued that either the distances which the Wei chroniclers give or the general line of direction they propose after reaching Kyushu must be wrong. If, for example, the instructions had said to turn *east* instead of *south* in Kyushu, then Yamatai must have been somewhere in the central provinces of the Kansai. If, on the other hand, the distances listed from one place to another in Japan were substantially less, Yamatai was most likely in Kyushu itself.

The important point is this: if Yamatai was located in the Kansai

about the mid-third century it would mean that the land of Wa, from Kyushu to at least the Kansai, was even at that time loosely unified or centralized under a single "country," whose ruler (Pimiko) maintained official contact as Wa's representative with the Wei kingdom of China. But if, as seems more plausible despite what the Wei history says, Yamatai was simply the leader of "thirty countries" of Kyushu, then the merger or unification of the Kyushu and Kansai cultural zones had yet to take place.

In fact, this merger—and with it the founding of the historic Japanese state with its seat in the Kansai—seems to have occurred sometime between 250 and 400. Regrettably, the fall of the Wei kingdom in 265 brought to an end references to Japan in the Chinese histories until the fifth century, and we have no other written records for this time span of a century and a half. Rulers of the "countries" of Wa had from at least the first century A.D. repeatedly sought official recognition and backing from the Han and Wei regimes of China; but with the fall of the Wei and the beginning of disunion in north China, the Wa people apparently abandoned their efforts to maintain formal ties with the continent.

The Tomb Period

From about the year 300 Japan entered a new age of material development, most distinctive in the construction of earthen and stone tombs. Thousands of these tombs still lie widely scattered throughout Japan. Some appear to be little more than small knolls of land; but others are of truly stupendous proportions, in particular the one near present-day Osaka that is alleged to be the burial place of a semi-legendary emperor of the early fourth century named Nintoku. Although these tumuli have various shapes, some patterned on similar tombs found on the continent, Nintoku's is in the form of a giant keyhole, a shape that is unique to Japan. Surrounded by three moats, it occupies a land area of some eighty acres and is exceeded in sheer geographic size only by the tomb of the third century B.C. founder of China's Ch'in dynasty.

The appearance of these tombs from the fourth century testifies that Japanese society had reached a stage of differentiation in which an aristocratic class was able to mobilize the manpower and material resources necessary to build such gigantic monuments for its leaders. The largest and most imposing of the tombs are, like Nintoku's, in

and around the Kansai and it was plainly here that the new rulers of Japan centered their efforts to unify the country under their rule.

Within the burial chambers of the tombs have been found a great variety of objects, including bronze and iron weapons, tools, and body ornaments. Of these funerary pieces, three—the long-sword, the Han-style mirror, and a type of curved "jewel" known as *magatama* —later became the sacred regalia, or symbols of emperorship, of the Japanese Imperial House.

Scholars have long puzzled over the origins of Japan's new rulers of the early tomb period. Some have even speculated that a group of horseriding warriors from northeast Asia invaded Kyushu shortly before the fourth century and militarily subjugated the country from at least Kyushu to the Kansai. One thing is clear: the rapid centralization of power in the Kansai during the fourth century was made possible only by important new advances in military technology and methods of fighting, whether or not these were directly received from northeast Asia or elsewhere. The Wei chroniclers, commenting on conditions in the early third century, had noted that the people of Wa either did not have or did not make use of horses. Yet the Japanese rulers of the fourth and fifth centuries were not only horseriders, but highly professional warriors on horseback. Despite an absence of written records, we have concrete proof of this in the collection of marvelously artistic and historically invaluable clay figurines known as *haniwa* that date from this age.

The *haniwa,* which show no readily identifiable foreign influences, constitute probably the most thoroughly "native" art form that the Japanese have produced. Usually a few feet in height, they have been found pressed into the earth around and on the tombs. The earliest *haniwa* are cylindrical in shape and may have been employed either to reduce erosion or to mark off certain areas on the tombs for symbolic or ceremonial purposes. Later, *haniwa* were molded into a whole variety of depictive forms, including houses, people, boats, animals, fish, and birds. The best assumption is that these depictive *haniwa* were intended to provide for the deceased representations of the things, both animate and inanimate, with which he was most closely associated during his lifetime. The traditional theory that the *haniwa* were first used as substitutes for people in order to end the gruesome practice of burying men alive with their dead masters is obviously erroneous, since the cylinder and house *haniwa,* to name just two, were made long before the human ones.

Warriors and horses are quite prevalent among the *haniwa* and it is these that most vividly attest to the strongly military orientation of the ruling aristocracy of the fourth and fifth centuries. The warrior figurines are elaborately clad in body armor and helmets and possess a variety of weapons, including swords, spears, daggers, and bows and arrows. Their horses are outfitted with ornamented saddles and harnesses and occasionally with metal face protectors. The impression presented by both man and beast is one of formidable preparedness for military combat. And indeed the newly organized fighting power of Japan's leaders is reflected not only in their internal centralization of rule around this time but also in the expansionist policy which they pursued in Korea from about the mid-fourth century.

Relations between Japan and southern Korea had been close for at least several centuries. Quite likely there was at first no clear political distinction between the two places, as immigrants to Kyushu maintained ties with relatives who had remained in southern Korea. With time, of course, "nationalistic" distinctions naturally arose. By the fourth century, three kingdoms were vying for supremacy in Korea: Koguryŏ in the north, Paekche in the west, and Silla in the east. Increasingly the Japanese became involved in the endless struggles among these Korean kingdoms, more often than not siding with Paekche against the others.

Around 369 the Japanese secured a territorial foothold in Korea at Mimana on the southern tip of the peninsula. Japanese sources tend perhaps to exaggerate the size and importance of Mimana. It may have been anything from a lonely outpost or military garrison to a kind of colony. But there can be little doubt that Japanese armies were deeply committed in Korea. In the history of the Liu Sung dynasty (420–479) of southern China it is recorded that on five separate occasions between 413 and 478 rulers of Japan petitioned the Liu Sung court for confirmation of various titles related to Japan and the countries comprising Korea, including those of "King of Wa" and "Generalissimo Who Maintains Peace in the East Commanding with Battle-Ax All Military Affairs." The first of these Japanese rulers has been identified by some scholars as the Emperor Nintoku for whom, as we have seen, the most gigantic of the earthen mausoleums was constructed in the Kansai. It is not known precisely which titles Nintoku wanted to have confirmed, but at least two of

his successors were recognized by the Chinese in their claims to be military hegemons of Korea.

The Mythological Tradition

Before turning to the sixth century, when Japanese history becomes sharply clearer, let us examine briefly the mythological tradition of primitive Japan. The mythology of a people, quite apart from any literary pleasure it may provide, is of potential value to the historian for at least two reasons: because of the light it may shed on early customs, styles, habits, and the like; and because it may contain tales that are either literally or allegorically true. Japan's mythology is exceptionally rich and varied. Yet any meaningful analysis of it must be premised on an awareness of the time when and the conditions under which it was first put into writing. Scholars generally agree that the mythology as it first appears in the oldest extant written records of the Japanese—the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* of the early eighth century—is based chiefly on two works, an imperial genealogy and a book of "ancient words," that were written sometime in the sixth century. Japan by the sixth century, if not sooner, was indisputably ruled by a single dynastic line of emperors and almost certainly the traditional myths were arranged, and perhaps new ones were added, to cast special luster on the founding deity (*kami*) and lineage of the Imperial House. Moreover, the period from the sixth through the early eighth century, when its mythology was being put into writing, was also an epoch when Japan was profoundly under the sway of Chinese civilization and was almost completely reliant on the Chinese language for permanent, written expression. Inevitably, the compilers of Japan's mythology were influenced by Chinese philosophy and literary style and even by specific Chinese legends.

Only a brief sketch of the principal stories of Japanese mythology can be given here. In the beginning heaven and earth were separated. After six generations, the brother and sister *kami,* Izanagi and Izanami, appeared on the "plain of high heaven" and were commissioned to produce a "drifting land." Izanagi thrust a spear into the ocean below and as he withdrew it brine dripped from the tip and the small island of Onokoro was formed. Izanagi and Izanami went down to Onokoro by means of a bridge from heaven and, after giving birth to the remainder of the Japanese islands, produced a

vast pantheon of *kami,* including *kami* of the sea, rivers, wind, woods, and mountains. In the process of giving birth to the *kami* of fire, however, Izanami was badly burned and went down to the "world of darkness." Izanagi, in an Orpheus and Eurydice type of sequence, went in search of his sister-wife. He was asked not to look upon her, but did and saw her in a horrible state of putrefaction.

Fleeing from the outraged Izanami, Izanagi returned to the upper world and went directly to a river to cleanse and purify himself. Among the *kami* he produced while disrobing and washing were the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and the storm god, Susanoo. Izanagi directed Amaterasu to ascend to heaven to be supreme ruler of the universe and Susanoo to assume dominion over the sea. Before taking up his duties, however, the unruly Susanoo went to heaven to say farewell to his sister and, while there, broke down the dividers of her rice fields, filled in her irrigation ditches, defecated in her palace, and committed other outrages. Shocked and dismayed, Amaterasu withdrew into a cave—plunging the world into darkness—and had to be lured out by the other *kami* of heaven.

Amaterasu eventually ordered her grandson, Ninigi, to descend and establish rule over the land of "luxuriant rice fields," bestowing upon him as symbols of his mandate the regalia of mirror, sword, and jewel. Ninigi arrived in southeastern Kyushu. Some time later his great-grandson, Jimmu, undertook a punitive campaign against aboriginal tribes to the east. Jimmu's expedition carried him through the region of the Inland Sea to what was to become the province of Yamato in the Kansai, where he conducted ceremonies to his ancestress, Amaterasu, and proclaimed himself the first emperor of Japan. The date of these ceremonies and of Jimmu's enthronement is regarded as the Foundation Day of the Japanese Empire and was calculated by historians of the seventh century A.D. to be equivalent to February 11, 660 B.C.

The myths contained in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* collectively constitute the "scriptures" of Shintō or the "way of the *kami,*" Japan's native faith. Many bear a strikingly close resemblance to tales from widely dispersed regions of Asia, the Pacific, and even the West. The story of Izanagi's production of the island of Onokoro by dipping his spear into the ocean, for example, has a strong Polynesian flavoring: in various parts of Melanesia, Micronesia, and elsewhere, islands are mythically supposed to have been brought into being by primordial deities who "fished" them out of the ocean.

Unlike the Greeks and many other ancient peoples, the early Japanese gave little thought to the underworld or to man's state after death. Hence, in the episode in which Izanagi went in search of Izanami, the "world of darkness" is very indistinctly depicted. Shintō places great stress on cleansing or lustration, and death was regarded as simply one of a number of forms of pollution that demanded purification. Izanagi's visit to the river after returning to the upper world was thus in the best Shintō tradition. His thoughts were not at all with Izanami's sad state nor with what might become of her spirit, but rather with how to terminate the whole messy business as quickly as possible by performing lustration.

Amaterasu, the sun goddess, is the supreme *kami* in the Shintō pantheon. In the view of many scholars she was probably elevated to this position at a fairly late date—possibly as late as the sixth century—in order to give her, as the tutelary deity of the Imperial House (which we may henceforth for the sake of convenience call the Yamato family), primacy over the deities from which the other aristocratic families claimed descent. This implies that the Yamato family, after securing military and political hegemony, sought also to enhance its sacerdotal position by having the mythology rearranged to show that the sun line of Amaterasu had been ordained by heaven to found the Japanese state and to rule over it eternally. Although it is intriguing to speculate that the third-century Queen Pimiko of Wa was incorporated into the native mythology as Amaterasu, it is very unlikely that Pimiko was historically the founder of the Yamato line. There is, in fact, good reason to believe that several families held the emperorship successively during the fourth and fifth centuries. Many specialists contend that the present Yamato line was not founded until the early sixth century when, after a period of some twenty years of disorder, a provincial chieftain from the Hokuriku region ascended the throne as Emperor Keitai.

Susanoo, the storm god, has been thought by a number of scholars to represent the enemy or enemies whom the Yamato family had to overcome in order to consolidate its rulership. The outrages that he committed—destruction of field-dividers, filling in of ditches, defecating in the palace—were regarded as "heavenly" transgressions, in contrast to others, such as bestiality and the casting of spells, which were labeled "earthly" transgressions. Of the two types, the heavenly transgressions were by far the more serious, since they were held to threaten the welfare of the community as a whole.

The story of Ninigi's descent from heaven parallels similar myths from northeast Asia and has been cited as "proof" that Japan was indeed invaded during some age by people from this region of the continent who, under an "Emperor Jimmu," militarily asserted their mastery over Japan. Yet the myth of Jimmu's campaign from Kyushu to the Kansai contains many elements that suggest that it, like the Amaterasu myth, was not constructed until the sixth century and was thus also aimed at strengthening the claims to divine rulership of the reigning Yamato family.

There are, in various episodes of the mythology, references to recalcitrant tribes or nations of people who opposed the Yamato court. We know that historically the court was obliged to deal with certain "barbarians" as it sought to expand its rule ever farther outward from the Kansai. The chief among these were the Kumaso of southern Kyushu and the Emishi of eastern and northern Honshu. The Emishi in particular have long puzzled historians, who have advanced many theories about their origins and identity. It was once widely believed that the Emishi of the early myths and records of Japan were none other than the Jōmon people, who were gradually pushed eastward and forcibly dispossessed of their land by the bearers of Yayoi culture (assumed to be the historical Japanese). Yet we have already noted the strong probability that the transition from Jōmon to Yayoi sometime about 300 B.C. did not involve a large-scale displacement of one people by another but rather the adoption of a more advanced culture from abroad by the existing inhabitants of Jōmon Japan.

The Emishi tribesmen have also frequently been identified with the Ainu, a caucasoid people who now live in Hokkaido. Recent studies of the mummified bodies of individuals known to be at least partly of Emishi extraction, however, show these individuals to have none of the physical characteristics of the Ainu. Other historical researches, moreover, point to the strong likelihood that the Ainu never settled south of Hokkaido. Far from being the Emishi, the Ainu were probably the natural enemies of the Emishi and may periodically have conducted sea raids southward against them in Honshu.

Theories such as these about the Emishi and the Ainu are admittedly still highly conjectural. Nevertheless, it appears that the Emishi, against whom campaigns of subjugation were conducted in the eastern and northern provinces until the early ninth century, were in fact people of the same general ethnic stock as the followers

of the Yamato court but were culturally so backward that they came to be regarded as barbarians and veritable aliens.

The Yamato Period

It was during the sixth century that Japan entered, if not fully, at least substantially into the light of written history. It is possible now to discuss with much more assurance than heretofore the evolution of Japanese culture and socio-political institutions.

The Imperial Court of the sixth century, located in or near the province of Yamato in the Kansai, exercised a kind of hegemony over a number of territorially based extended families, or *uji,* ranging from Kyushu in the west to the border of Emishi-land in the eastern provinces of the Kanto. Each *uji,* which was composed of blood relatives as well as people incorporated as fictive kin, was headed by a patriarch or chieftain (*uji no kami*) whose role, like that of the emperor at the head of the Imperial House, was both political and sacerdotal. As part of his rulership, the chieftain was called upon to perform certain sacred rites to the tutelary deity (*ujigami*) of the *uji* that were considered essential to its social cohesion and generational continuity.

Of the *uji* that constituted Japan's ruling aristocracy at this time possibly a quarter or more were of foreign—that is, Chinese or Korean—origin. For a century or more these foreign families had emigrated steadily to Japan where, with their special skills and knowledge of continental civilization, they easily acquired high social status and position. Without these foreign families, the sweeping reforms of the seventh century that transformed Japan from a backward country on the edge of Asia to a remarkably flourishing China in miniature would have been impossible.

We do not have sufficient records to determine precisely the degree of hegemony or authority that the Yamato court was able to exercise over the *uji.* Undoubtedly it varied from region to region and from one period to another. The court appears from perhaps the fourth century to have bestowed certain titles on the *uji* chieftains, such as *kuni-no-miyatsuko* (provincial commander), in an attempt to draw them more fully under central jurisdiction. In the course of putting down rebellions and otherwise expanding its activities into the provinces during the fifth and sixth centuries, moreover, the court was able to acquire certain agricultural lands, known as *miyake,* within

the territorial domains of the *uji*. Although we do not know how extensive the *miyake* holdings were, it appears that they came to constitute a substantial public domain on which the court was able to base a far more radical policy of land nationalization in the mid-seventh century.

In addition to the above provincial titles, some of the more prominent *uji* chieftains received hereditary rankings, or *kabane,* that signified their right to participate in central affairs as ministers at court. The origins of the *kabane* are obscure. They may at first have been simply terms of respect used by *uji* members toward their chieftains, and only later adopted by the court as its principal ministerial designations. By mid-sixth century in any event, certain *kabane,* especially those of *omi* and *muraji,* were held by chieftains whose power at court rivaled that of the Imperial House.

Below the aristocratic or *uji* level, the great mass of Japanese society was formed into occupational groups or *be*. By far the largest of these groups were farmers, but others were comprised of fishermen, weavers, potters, and the like. Each *uji* controlled the *be* within its territorial domain and the Imperial House, in addition to the usual *be,* had special occupational groups (e.g., the Mononobe or "armorers," the Nakatomi or "attendants," the Imbe or "ritualists") that were in themselves great *uji* whose chieftains held *kabane* rankings at court.

The late sixth and seventh centuries, to which we turn our attention now, were a time of great vitality in East Asia. China's unification under the Sui (589–618) and T'ang (618–907) dynasties provided the impetus and the model for similar efforts toward unification and centralization in both Korea and Japan. After more than four centuries of disunion, China had emerged, restructured and reinvigorated, as the great "Middle Kingdom" of East Asia. One of the most important forces in China during the period of disunion and subsequent unification was Buddhism, which had been introduced to China from India sometime about the first century A.D. It is entirely appropriate to label the years from approximately the third until the eighth century as the great Buddhist age in East Asia. Buddhism at that time and at that place undoubtedly seemed as vital an ingredient of civilization and progress as, say, the Christian value system did to the Western peoples of the nineteenth century. The introduction of Buddhism to Japan, therefore, implied far more than simply the introduction of a new and purportedly efficacious

body of religious doctrine. It meant the exposure of a geographically remote and still culturally backward people to all the glories and achievements of Chinese civilization.

The date traditionally given for the introduction of Buddhism to Japan is 552, when the Korean king of Paekche is supposed to have sent some scriptures and Buddhist statuary to the Japanese court in the hope of securing Japanese aid in his efforts to check the expansion of the state of Silla. Certainly the Japanese knew of Buddhism long before 552. Nevertheless, it is convenient to use this date as the point from which to study the ensuing process of 150 years of reform that brought the establishment of an impressively centralized state in Japan by the early eighth century. The reform process took place in two stages: a preparatory stage from about 552 until 645, and a stage of actual reform from the great Taika land reform of 645 until the founding of the first fixed capital at the city of Nara in 710.

During the period of reform in the sixth and seventh centuries Buddhism functioned as the principal carrier of Chinese culture and institutions to Japan. The issue that arose at the Yamato court about mid-sixth century over whether to "accept" or "reject" Buddhism was in reality a debate over the desirability of undertaking central reform on Chinese lines. Those who came most vigorously to oppose Buddhism were the families that had the largest vested interest in the *status quo,* particularly the *muraji* family of Nakatomi and the Great *Muraji* family of Mononobe. The Nakatomi claimed descent from a *kami* who, according to the mythology, had "attended" Ninigi on his descent from heaven to establish rule on earth. Along with the Imbe, they were responsible for the performance of sacred Shintō rituals at court. The Mononobe, on the other hand, were concerned chiefly with military matters and persisted in advocating a warlike, rashly imperialistic policy in Korea even though, since Japan had steadily lost ground there throughout the sixth century, such a policy was no longer tenable.

The most progressive family, and the one that most forcefully urged espousal of Buddhism, was the Great *Omi* family of Soga, which came to power with the accession of Emperor Kimmei in 531. The Soga, who were especially interested in matters of taxation and finance, appear to have established the first national treasury (*ōkura-shō*) in Japan and to have introduced various rudimentary practices of fiscal responsibility at court. They seem, moreover, to have re-

garded Korea far less as an arena for territorial expansion than as a bridge to China and a potential source of foreign trade.

The struggle between the pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist factions at court is told in fanciful and picturesque terms in the *Nihon Shoki*. When the court granted the Soga permission to build a private chapel to house and worship a Buddhist image, a pestilence swept over the land and was interpreted as a sign of disfavor on the part of the native *kami*. The Nakatomi and Mononobe thereupon destroyed the Soga chapel and threw the Buddhist image into a canal. Some two decades later, in 585, the Soga resumed their devotional practices. Once again there was a pestilence and once again the anti-Buddhists destroyed the Soga chapel and image. But this time the pestilence did not cease and the Soga were allowed to continue their worship. They now clearly held the upper hand at court. In 587 they attacked their chief rivals, the Mononobe, defeated them decisively, and inaugurated a period of ascendancy that was to last until the mid-seventh century.

What was the extent of the ascendancy or supremacy achieved by the Soga? Unlike the *muraji* families of Nakatomi and Mononobe, who had long functioned at court as service *uji* for the imperial family, the *omi* family of Soga was a great provincial or "outside" *uji* which had only relatively recently become active in central affairs. In the competition for power at court the Soga had a great advantage in that the Imperial House usually married with women from the *omi* families, which were apparently regarded as more on a level of social equality with it, and only rarely with women of the *muraji* or service *uji*. By the time of the Soga victory in 587, Soga blood flowed freely in the veins of many of the most prominent members of the Imperial House.

To consolidate the Soga's newly won position, the family chieftain Soga Umako first installed his nephew as Emperor Sushun and, when the latter proved insufficiently amenable to Soga control, had him murdered and replaced in 592 with a niece, Suiko (r. 592–628). Suiko, the first historical empress of Japan, was clearly intended to be a figurehead for Umako; yet her appointment to the throne does not mean that the Soga were able completely to dominate the Imperial House at this time. There were still a number of imperial princes who were very active politically. Chief among these and one of the towering figures of Japanese history was Prince Shōtoku, who came to hold the dual positions of crown prince and regent for his aunt, Empress Suiko.

Later generations, in celebrating Shōtoku as the great intellectual of his age and the principal precursor of central reform in Japan, have badly distorted his figure historically, so that we cannot be sure precisely which of his "achievements" are real and which are later attributions. There seems little doubt, however, that he was a man of considerable learning and erudition for his time and probably had a voice, along with Soga Umako, in most of the major decisions and policies of the final years of the sixth century and the first two decades of the seventh. Shōtoku is credited, among other things, with having written an exegetical text on Buddhism and the first national history of Japan, neither of which survives today. He is also supposed to have been chiefly responsible for the building of the Hōryūji, a temple on the outskirts of present-day Nara which remains one of the country's greatest architectural masterpieces.

Among the administrative measures traditionally attributed to Shōtoku is the institution in 603 of the Twelve-Cap Ranking System, whereby ministers at court were to be distinguished by differently colored headpieces. This system has long been interpreted as an attempt by the prince to challenge the monopoly of ministerial positions held by the Soga and other leading families through the granting of cap ranks to individual officials more on the basis of merit than of birth. Yet modern scholars tend to doubt this interpretation, which derives from the view that the previously "progressive" Soga, once in power, were content to perpetuate unchanged a loose system of central government that allowed ministerial participation only to the holders of the particularistic *omi* and *muraji* ratings. It appears, in fact, that there may have been a substantial broadening of ministerial recruitment and even bureaucratization—i.e., the regularization, rationalization, and differentiation of governing functions—at court under the Soga in the late sixth century. Soga Umako, moreover, may have been as much responsible as Prince Shōtoku for the introduction of the Cap Ranking System (which was apparently modeled on similar systems in the Korean kingdoms of Koguryŏ and Paekche) in order to give hierarchical designations to the many new middle and lower grade officials who had come in recent years to serve at court.

In 604, the year following inauguration of the Cap Ranking System, Shōtoku is purported to have issued his famous Seventeen Article Constitution. The word Constitution is misleading, since this document as it is reproduced in the *Nihon Shoki* does not contain what we would consider fixed laws or administrative provisions. One

article calls upon the people to pay reverence to the Three Treasures of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Law, and the Religious Community); but essentially the Seventeen Article Constitution is a collection of maxims based on Han Confucianism that outline the qualities necessary for a virtuous officialdom. Although the admonitions that ministers must be frugal, industrious, prompt, impartial, obedient, and the like may seem to us simplistic and of only elementary value in dealing with practical matters of state, they are epochal in that they constitute the first statement in Japanese history of the need for government by ethical men.

A number of scholars strongly question whether Prince Shōtoku actually wrote or could have written the Seventeen Article Constitution. They base their doubts essentially on the number of seeming anachronisms that the document contains in references to conditions and institutions of the late rather than the early seventh century. Article XII, for example, calls upon the *kokushi* and *kuni-no-miyatsuko* to refrain from levying exactions on the people without specific authorization from the court. We have noted that the title of *kuni-no-miyatsuko* or "provincial commander" was of ancient origin; but *kokushi,* which later became the standard designation for provincial governor, does not appear to have been used in Japan before the Taika Reform. Phrases such as "the lord is heaven and the minister is earth" (Article III) and "there are not two lords in heaven just as there are not two masters on earth" (Article XII) are also viewed with suspicion because they suggest a degree of centralized authority under the throne that simply did not exist in Japan before the Taika Reform period. In short, if Prince Shōtoku was the original author of the Seventeen Article Constitution, his manuscript was without doubt considerably amended and revised by others prior to its inclusion in the *Nihon Shoki.*

One extremely important area of court activity in which Prince Shōtoku seems to have played a key role was the dispatch of official missions and students to China. The court sent a total of four missions to Sui China: in 600, 607, 608, and 614. Ono no Imoko, traditionally regarded as Japan's first overseas student, led the 607 and 608 missions. Among the fellow students and priests who traveled with him, several remained abroad for two or more decades and a few returned to play prominent roles in the Taika Reform. The journey to the continent was a dangerous one in this age. Boats were frequently sunk or blown far off course. Yet the rewards of a firsthand

Chinese education were great, as attested by the number of people during the next two centuries who gained fame and fortune after studying on the continent.

On the mission of 607 Ono no Imoko carried a message, generally attributed to Prince Shōtoku, to the Sui emperor that began: "From the Son of Heaven of the Land of the Rising Sun to the Son of Heaven of the Land of the Setting Sun." This terminology, needless to say, was not appreciated by the Sui emperor, who without doubt regarded the Japanese as little more than impertinent barbarians in the eastern sea. And indeed, so far as we know, the Japanese from the time of the first references to the land of Wa in the Later Han and Wei histories had freely and even eagerly accepted an inferior, tributary relationship vis-à-vis China. Shōtoku, if he was in fact the author of the 607 message, appears thus to have been the first Japanese leader to assert that Japan's national status was on a level with that of China. Prewar Japanese scholars chauvinistically overstressed the importance of this. Yet the fact remains that the Japanese, alone among the peoples of East Asia, were, with one exception, never again to accept subordinate treatment in their official dealings with China.

After the fall of the Sui Dynasty in 618 Japan allowed another dozen years to elapse before it sought to renew ties with China. The first mission to T'ang China departed in 630. During the next two centuries or so the Japanese sent a total of twelve such missions to China, usually consisting of from two to four boats and from 100 to perhaps as many as 600 people. The varied adventures of the government officials, students, priests, and others who participated in the missions make fascinating footnotes to this age in East Asian history. To the Japanese these missions, even though sporadically dispatched, were absolutely essential to the continuance and completion of their tutelage in the ways of Chinese civilization.

In 600, the very same year that Shōtoku sent the first mission to Sui China, the Japanese had also dispatched an army of some 10,000 troops to Korea in an attempt to recover their position in Mimana, which they had lost to the incursions of Paekche and Silla in 562. Although the Japanese expeditionary force soundly defeated Silla in 600 and exacted from her a pledge to pay the tribute which Mimana had formerly rendered to the Yamato court, Silla never honored the pledge and in 602–3 the Japanese gathered a much larger contingent of approximately 25,000 men to send over. It never left Kyushu,

however, owing to the sudden death of its first commander (Shōtoku's brother) and subsequent misfortunes.

Prince Shōtoku died in 622 and Soga Umako in 626. These two men had provided superior leadership for Japan during the early stages of governmental and cultural reform in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. In a still primitive and underdeveloped society a few men of their calibre can, by virtually their efforts alone, implement changes and reforms whose importance the vast majority of their countrymen can only dimly, if at all, perceive. Japan during this age had, of course, the special advantage of numerous skilled personnel among its large immigrant population. Nevertheless, the roles of Shōtoku and Umako in providing direction for the great process of reform on Chinese lines launched at this time seem to have been crucial and their deaths unquestionably slowed its momentum.

The Taika Reform

Umako's successors as Great *Omi* were his son Emishi and his grandson Iruka, to whom Emishi relinquished the title in 643 for reasons of health. We are greatly hampered in our attempts to evaluate the period from 626 until 645, when Emishi and Iruka managed the affairs of the land, because the authors of our only source, the *Nihon Shoki,* have depicted these men in such highly stereotyped terms as Chinese-style bad last rulers. It appears, in any case, that Emishi and Iruka devoted little if any of their time to innovation. Rather, they concentrated on keeping the throne supplied with nonentities and in crushing the political ambitions of promising imperial aspirants, such as Shōtoku's son, Prince Yamashiro no Ōe, whom Iruka attacked and forced to commit suicide in 643.

The most heinous offense of Emishi and Iruka, in the eyes of the *Nihon Shoki*'s authors, was to covet the throne for themselves. In quest of it they purportedly built huge personal mausoleums that rivaled those of the Imperial House, constructed grand homes which they referred to as "palaces," and spoke of the children of their households as "princes." Whatever the truth of these allegations by the authors of the *Nihon Shoki,* it is quite possible that Emishi and Iruka did conceive of usurping the throne for their own family. The later deliberate efforts, as we shall see, of emperors after the Taika Reform to reaffirm and to heighten the sacred character of the imperial position may initially have been motivated by fears that the

Yamato family had indeed, on the eve of the Taika Reform, been perilously close to supplantation by the Soga as Japan's ruling dynasty.

By the late 630s and early 640s Emishi and Iruka had become, if not potential usurpers, certainly the principal obstacles to further reform. A clandestine group became convinced that only their forcible removal from power could make possible a further reduction in the autonomy of the provincial *uji,* including the Soga, and true centralization of rule under the throne. The leaders of this group were Nakatomi Kamatari, a member of one of the families that had most strenuously opposed the Soga a century before on the issue of Buddhism, and Prince Naka, son of the reigning empress. They were eventually joined by men from nearly all the factions at court, including a ranking Soga minister, indicating that the widespread antipathy toward Emishi and Iruka may have been as much personal as ideological.

The reform group of Kamatari and Prince Naka had as its theoreticians men who had traveled to China and had studied intensively the institutions and thought of the newly founded T'ang dynasty. Among them were Takamuko Kuromaro, Minabuchi Shōan, and the priest Min, all of whom had journeyed to the continent in the mission of 608. They had been in China during the momentous period of transition from the Sui to the T'ang dynasty, and were not only profoundly impressed by the vigor and brilliance of the new T'ang government but also alarmed by the possibility of future T'ang military expansion in the direction of Japan. Although the T'ang rulers had continued the Sui policy of aggression against northern Korea, the likelihood that they would attempt to invade Japan must have been slim indeed, if not entirely nonexistent, at this time. Nevertheless, Japan's leaders throughout the seventh century seem to have felt an acute sense of foreign crisis and potential outside threat. The group led by Kamatari and Prince Naka saw the specter of T'ang military might as one of the more compelling reasons to overthrow the Soga and to get on with centralization of the Japanese state.

Accordingly, on the occasion of a high state function in the sixth month of 645, Prince Naka and his cohorts undertook a coup by slaughtering Soga Iruka at the imperial palace in full view of the empress and her attendants. The following day Emishi set fire to his mansion and perished in the flames. With remarkable swiftness, some six decades of Soga ascendancy came abruptly to an end. The vic-

torious conspirators immediately declared the commencement of a new epoch, which they called Taika (Great Change) in imitation of the Chinese practice of designating calendrical eras. And on New Year's Day of the following year, 646, they issued an edict which set forth the general intent of the Taika Reform.

As in the case of Prince Shōtoku's Seventeen Article Constitution and other statements and manifestoes of the seventh century, we have the text of the Taika Reform Edict only as it appears in the *Nihon Shoki,* most likely considerably revised and edited. It is nonetheless clear that the Reform in its earliest stages was intended to be primarily a land reform. The reformists wished first of all to destroy the existing systems of landholding and social organization by means of which the great *uji* had exercised virtually autonomous control over their territorial domains and over the people of the various occupational groups, or *be,* that lived on them. These "private lands and private people" were now declared to be "public lands and public people." In this way the reformists sought to assert the right of public domain over land everywhere and to affirm the status of all people as direct subjects of the throne.

The new land and tax systems inaugurated at this time were modeled closely on the "equal field" and "triple tax" systems which had been perfected by the T'ang dynasty in China. Henceforth farming lands were to be allotted equitably on the basis of one plot per adult male and specified lesser plots for others. Individuals were to occupy and work these lands during their lifetimes (after which they were to revert to the government for reallotment) and were to be responsible for three kinds of taxes: a harvest tax, a "special products" tax (e.g., silk, cotton cloth, thread), and a corvée labor tax, including military conscription.

It is not at all clear how widely this new land system was enforced. Quite likely the degree of enforcement varied according to region. We do know that from the outset a number of concessions in the form of special allotments were made to members of the former ruling *uji,* which gave them vastly larger holdings than the average peasant, and also that the periodic inspections tended to become less and less frequent. The whole idea of an "equal field" system was excessively idealistic for Japan of the seventh century. That it worked for as long as it did is perhaps remarkable and is attributable in part to the fact that even before the Taika Reform the court had begun, as we have noted, to extend its right of public domain over an increasingly

larger portion of the country through the acquisition of special *miyake* holdings. Nevertheless, the Taika land system did contain inherent flaws and it began to break down during the eighth century.

The leaders at court during the early years of the Taika Reform period did not devote a great deal of attention to enlargement and reorganization of the central bureaucracy, but preferred to leave these matters until a time when they should feel more secure in their power. The old *kabane* titles (including those of Great *Omi* and Great *Muraji*) were, however, immediately abolished and three ministers—a minister of the left, a minister of the right, and a minister of the center—were appointed to be the chief assistants to the throne in government. Prince Naka also granted the minister of the center, Nakatomi Kamatari, the new surname of Fujiwara in recognition of his extraordinary services to the Imperial House. As Fujiwara Kamatari, this distinguished statesman became the first of a family line that was subsequently to rise to the highest circles of prominence in the court aristocracy of ancient Japan.

In 645, at the same time that the new calendrical era of Taika was proclaimed, the court for the first time used the national designation of "Nihon." This designation, which has entered English as "Japan" from its Chinese pronunciation of "Jih-pen," literally means "source of the sun" and was most likely derived from the phrase "Land of the Rising Sun" which Prince Shōtoku used in his communication to the Sui court in 607.

According to the Taika Reform Edict, Japan or "Nihon" was to be divided into the new geopolitical units of province (*kuni*), district (*gun*), and township (*ri*, consisting of about fifty households). Each province was to be headed by a provincial governor (*kokushi*) and each district by a district governor (*gunji*). Whereas the provincial governors, who were given four-year terms of office, were usually men sent out from the court, the district governors were selected from among local magnates and appear from the first to have occupied their positions on a more or less permanent, hereditary basis. Those who became the new district governors were, by and large, members of the class of lesser *uji* chieftains who had formerly held the *kuni-no-miyatsuko* (provincial commander) rankings. The awarding of district governorships to them was simply one means by which the court sought to ensure their support for the over-all policies of reform. But such a major concession to outside interests clearly indicates at the same time that the court reformists, despite their success in over-

throwing the Soga, were not in a position to press for too drastic changes in regional administration.

Society during the Taika Reform period came to be divided into two general categories, the so-called good people and mean people. The "good" people included: 1) the vast majority of peasant workers, craftsmen, and artisans who had formerly constituted the occupational groups, or *be;* and 2) the ruling families of the aristocracy, whose positions were distinguished by their right to hold court ranks. The "mean" people, who comprised about ten percent of the population, were chiefly slave-like personal servants. Marxian historians, in particular, are interested in the "mean" people and the question of slavery in this early period of Japanese history. In seeking to demonstrate that seventh-century Japan had a strong slave coloration they point to the fact that, of the three taxes levied on the peasantry at this time, by far the most onerous was the corvée or labor tax. They further note that, with the shift to a feudal society several centuries later, the ruling class minimized its direct, chattel-like exploitation of human labor and concentrated instead on extracting heavy harvest rents from the peasants, who were by then locked in serfdom.

The single most powerful individual at court during the early decades of the Taika Reform period was without question Prince Naka. Curiously, however, he did not actually ascend the throne until 668. Rather, he allowed his uncle and mother (for the second time) to reign while he occupied the position of crown prince. Naka, in his apparent reluctance to accept the final exalted rank to which he was so eminently entitled, even permitted the throne to remain vacant for some seven years after his mother's death in 661.

None of the theses that have been advanced to explain Naka's attitude toward the throne is entirely convincing. It has been suggested, for instance, that he wished to follow the example of the former crown prince and regent, Prince Shōtoku, who he believed had deliberately kept the Empress Suiko removed and aloof—like a later-day Pimiko—from the practical matters of state. Yet if Naka liked the idea of a nonacting sovereign whose principal role was passively to sanctify the acts of others, he certainly reversed his thinking when he finally took the throne and became a forceful emperor in his own right. Perhaps more plausible is the view that Naka sincerely felt he could better maintain a consensus among his followers during the delicate early phases of the Taika Reform if he did not immediately

become sovereign and expose himself to the charge that he sought only personal power and glory.

Whatever Prince Naka's private feelings about it, the Japanese imperial institution during the late sixth and seventh centuries was in an important stage of development owing to the influence of Chinese theories of kingship on existing native practices. Around mid-sixth century the Yamato ruler had been known principally as *ō-kimi* (Great *Kimi*), a title that appears to have been very similar to the *kabane* designations of *ō-omi* (Great *Omi*) and *ō-muraji* (Great *Muraji*). Moreover, just as there were lesser *uji* chieftains ranked as *omi* and *muraji*, there were still others who had the title of *kimi*. Perhaps, then, *ō-kimi* was simply the highest of the *kimi* just as the *ō-omi* and *ō-muraji* were respectively the most important of the *omi* and *muraji*. If so, the paramountcy of the Yamato ruler or *ō-kimi* in the sociopolitical hierarchy of mid-sixth century Japan was obviously nowhere near that of, let us say, the awesome Chinese emperor who, according to Confucian theory, enjoyed a "Mandate of Heaven."

Sometime in the early seventh century the Japanese, probably at Prince Shōtoku's instigation, replaced the title *ō-kimi* with the Chinese-style one of *tennō*, or "heavenly sovereign," in an obvious attempt to upgrade imperial prestige. Moreover, when Prince Naka finally ascended the throne as the Emperor Tenji in 668 he did so amid proclamations of portents and omens that indicated that he had received heaven's mandate. As adumbrated earlier, he most likely did this to elevate the imperial rank to an even higher realm of sanctity beyond the reach of any ministerial family that in the future might harbor the kind of aspirations once held by the Soga.

Several years prior to his accession Prince Naka had suffered the most severe setback of his political career. At the urgent pleading of Paekche, which was nearing national extinction under the relentless aggression of Silla, the prince had dispatched to Korea an expeditionary army that was decisively defeated by the combined forces of Silla and T'ang China in 663. As a result, Paekche perished, Korea was unified under Silla, and the Japanese were finally obliged to abandon their dreams of power in the peninsula. Apart from certain pirates during the medieval age, no Japanese were to fight overseas again for more than 900 years until the Korean invasions of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 1590s.

When Emperor Tenji (formerly Prince Naka) died in 671, a suc-

cession quarrel erupted between his son and his brother. In the violent fighting that ensued, the forces who supported the brother prevailed and the latter became the Emperor Temmu in 672. Temmu, who was probably the most powerful sovereign in Japanese history, made special use of Buddhist concepts of heavenly protection in seeking to propagandize the majesty of his rulership.

Scholars of a few generations ago were inclined to look upon Temmu's reign (672–86) as a period of conservative reaction to the more radical aspects of the Taika Reform. But more recently the tendency has been to credit Temmu with having consolidated the Reform in terms of its most fundamental goal, which was to centralize state power as fully as possible at court. Temmu's support in the succession struggle had come largely from the former *kuni-no-miyatsuko* class of lesser *uji* chieftains, who collectively were able to inflict severe defeat on several of the greater *uji* supporting the son's cause, including remnants of the once great Soga clan. Thus the Imperial House under Temmu found itself more secure than ever before from challenge by the other leading families that had formerly been joined loosely in the Yamato hegemony.

Both Tenji and Temmu are credited with having compiled important legal codes, although neither has been preserved until today. Nevertheless, it appears certain that the legal work undertaken during their two reigns and the reign of Temmu's wife and successor, Empress Jitō (r. 686–97), made possible the issuance of the great Taihō Code of 701, which became the fundamental law of the court for the next eleven and a half centuries. In addition, the period of Temmu and Jitō also witnessed a considerable acceleration in the regularization and bureaucratization of central government. By the turn of the century the stage was clearly set for the culminating accomplishments of early Japan's half-century of epochal reform: the compilation of the Taihō Code and the founding of a new imperial capital at Nara.

日本文化入門

II

The Age of the Court Nobles

BY

H. PAUL VARLEY

The Structure of Nara Japan

The compilation in 701 of the Taihō Code, named after the calendrical era of Taihō or "Great Treasure," and the founding of a new capital at Nara in 710 ushered in the age of the court nobles, a period which lasted until the late twelfth century. Although no copy of the Taihō Code remains today, later commentaries and supplements enable us to reconstruct most of its contents and thus to see the basic legal structure of Japan during this period.

The provisions of the code were divided into two major categories: *ritsu* (penal provisions) and *ryō* (administrative provisions). The former, closely patterned on T'ang law, prescribed generally light punishments in accord with the Confucian ideal of seeking good government through the inculcation of virtue rather than the imposition of harsh penalties. The administrative provisions, on the other hand, reflected a fairly conscious attempt on the part of the Japanese to adapt Chinese administrative practices to indigenous sentiment and conditions. This can perhaps best be seen in the establishment of a Department of Rites (*Jingikan*) directly below the throne on the same level as a Chinese-style Department of State (*Dajōkan*). Devoted exclusively to native Shintō and the court ritual associated with it, the Department of Rites constituted an important concession to purely Japanese attitudes toward rule. While it enjoyed little real power, this department served to bolster the traditional sanctity of the throne and to enhance the emperor's role as national mediator to the gods.

The Department of State, which was the chief administrative body under the Taihō Code, was divided into eight ministries: Central Administration, Ceremonial, Civil Affairs, People's Affairs, Military Affairs, Justice, the Treasury, and the Imperial Household. Among its leading officials were a chancellor (*dajō daijin*), a minister of the left, and a minister of the right. Since the chancellor's office was usually left vacant during the eighth century, the business of the Department of State was generally supervised by either the minister of the left or the minister of the right.

The Taihō Code said nothing about the emperorship or rules for selecting a sovereign. During the eighth century, as during the seventh, several empresses occupied the throne; but after the death of the Empress Shōtoku in 770, the succession (for reasons we shall see) was restricted to males. Even then, no strict procedure was adopted for choosing successors from among the various qualified princes of

the Imperial House. Although there was a general tendency from about the mid-ninth century to have the line of succession pass from father to son, a number of brothers, uncles, and other male relatives also ascended the throne.

Following several changes in the arrangement of ministerial rankings from the time of the institution of Prince Shōtoku's Twelve-Cap System in 603, the Taihō Code set forth a scheme of eight major ranks, with various subgradings, that was to remain virtually unchanged for courtier society during the remainder of the premodern period. Of the eight ranks, the first, second, and third were reserved for the very highest ministers at court and for members of the Imperial House; most officials could not aspire to rise above the fourth or fifth ranks during their careers; and members of the provincial officialdom (apart from provincial governors) were usually restricted to the seventh and eighth. Ranks held at court, moreover, were designated as "inner," whereas those possessed by functionaries in the provinces were labeled "outer." This discrimination between inner and outer officeholders and the overwhelming preference in rank given to the former contributed importantly to the steady decline in provincial administration during the age of the court nobles.

One of the most characteristic institutions of Chinese life from the period of the great Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) had been the system of civil service examinations. These examinations, based on knowledge of the Confucian Classics (themselves the repository of traditional Chinese morality and ethics), constituted the most important channel for entry into China's ministerial class. Japanese reformers from the time of Prince Shōtoku were well aware of this system; indeed the authors of the Taihō Code sought to inculcate the ideal of bureaucratic preferment through Confucian scholarship by providing for the construction of a central college and various branch colleges in the provinces.

Yet strong native sentiment militated against acceptance of this method of ministerial recruitment. Although special circumstances during the eighth century enabled a number of men from relatively modest social backgrounds to attain prominence either through the Buddhist priesthood or through Chinese studies, birth continued to be the overriding qualification for membership in Japan's aristocracy. The new system of court ranks set forth in the Taihō Code soon became tightly hedged by considerations of birth and family connections. So rigidly controlled had both court rank and government office

become by the Heian period (894–1185) that members of all but the smallest group of aristocratic families were completely denied access to them.

Shortly after issuance of the Taihō Code, the court decided to build a new capital at Nara in the northern part of the Yamato Plain. Until this time the seat of imperial authority had frequently been moved, usually in and around the central provinces. One reason for this (at least before the Taika Reform) was the Shintō belief that the death of a sovereign caused the pollution of a site; but decisions to move had also often been based on political and strategical considerations. In any case, the frequency and apparent facility with which its location was changed suggests that there was still a very limited administrative establishment. With the rapid bureaucratization of government during the Taika-Taihō period, however, the need for a more permanent ruling center became increasingly obvious.

The site of Nara was selected for various reasons. It was in a spacious location and it met the requirements of geomancy (in Chinese, *feng-shui*): that is, its mountains, rivers, and such were situated in the correct relationship to each other. Moreover, it was near certain important Buddhist temples, among them the Hōryūji, closely associated with the name of the venerated Prince Shōtoku.

Construction was begun in 708 and the court was moved to Nara in 710. Fashioned as a miniature of the Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an (present-day Sian), it captured perfectly the spirit of an age in East Asian history dominated by the pervasive influence of the great empire of the T'ang dynasty. As at Ch'ang-an, the focal point of Nara was the palace compound in its northernmost precincts where the emperor, in the traditional Chinese manner, could "look southward" toward his subjects. A grand thoroughfare extending south from the palace divided the city into eastern and western halves, each laid out symmetrically in a grid-like pattern of intersecting north-south and east-west avenues.

Little remains today of the original Nara (the present city of that name has grown up almost entirely in its northeastern suburbs). Yet Nara in its age of glory was an imposing metropolis and was, as far as we know, the first truly urban center in Japanese history. About one quarter the size in land area of Ch'ang-an, it rose to a population of some 200,000, about 10,000 being employed directly in government service. Japan's total population at this time is estimated to have been between five and six million people.

The founding of Nara was accompanied by a great burst of economic and administrative activity. Transportation and supply facilities were set up to link the provinces with the capital; post roads and service stations were constructed in each of the great circuits or ways (*dō*) into which the country was divided;[1] new officials were appointed to oversee the collection of taxes; and the government even minted coins (known as Wadō coins from the calendrical era 708–14) to facilitate the inflow of revenue to the treasury.

Although they helped to provide for the needs of the new leisure class of the capital, these measures of the early eighth century did not stimulate any substantial commercial development in the country as a whole. The government had great difficulty, for example, in getting people to exchange the Wadō coins for goods rather than simply holding onto them as curios or hoarding them. Outside the central provinces the coins were scarcely used at all, and the practice of barter remained almost universal. The minting of coins was continued sporadically in Japan until the ninth century, when it was discontinued, not to be resumed until the latter part of the sixteenth century. A fundamental reason for the failure of commerce to develop significantly beyond the capital region during the age of the court nobles was, as we shall see, the decay of the equal-field system of land tenure and the rise from about the mid-eighth century of private estates, which promoted localism and strengthened the principle of economic self-sufficiency throughout the provinces.

Several groups, apart from the sovereigns, contended for power at court during the Nara period (710–84). These included other members of the Imperial House, ministers of the leading courtier families (such as the Fujiwara, the Tachibana, and the Ōtomo), and Buddhist priests. The constant factional clashes, intrigues, and plottings that occurred suggest a fundamental instability in ruling institutions; yet the participation of people from varying backgrounds at least gave a diversity to political affairs in Nara times. A century or so later power came to be monopolized by one family, the Fujiwara, which dominated the throne and presided over a kind of government quite different from that set forth in the Taihō Code.

1. Of the seven circuits of early Japan the best known was the Tōkaidō (Eastern Water Way) that extended from the central to the eastern provinces. The Saikaidō (Western Water Way), which comprised the island of Kyushu, had a separate administrative center known as Dazaifu. Hokkaidō (Northern Water Way), the northernmost of the main islands of Japan today, was not one of the original *dō* but was given this designation in 1869.

The rise of the Fujiwara was not sudden or accidental. Kamatari, the first holder of the name, had been one of the chief architects of the Taika Reform and his son, Fubito, played a leading role in the drafting of the Taihō Code. A daughter of Fubito was made the ranking consort of the Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–49), the first person outside the Imperial House to achieve this status, and his four sons reached ministerial rank. The death of all four sons from plague in 739 was a severe setback to the Fujiwara, but before long the family was once again providing leaders at court and by the end of the century it was clearly ahead of its rivals in the competition for power.

Buddhism in Nara Japan

The Emperor Shōmu and his Fujiwara consort were fervent Buddhists and greatly encouraged the propagation of the foreign faith. Indeed, Shōmu and his chief advisers, some of whom were Buddhist priests, even aimed to use Buddhism as the "guardian of the state" to strengthen Japan institutionally. Such an aim may seem completely antithetical to the original spirit of Buddhism, which held this world to be a place of misery and suffering and was little concerned with sociopolitical institutions. But Buddhism in China during the Sui and early T'ang dynasties had great wealth and power and its adherents were the chief transmitters of Chinese culture to other lands. To Japanese of the Nara period the idea of having Buddhism serve as the "guardian of the state" must have seemed eminently fitting.

In 737 Shōmu, following the precedents of both the Sui and T'ang dynasties, ordered the construction of a temple and nunnery in each of the provinces of Japan; and to serve as the center for this network of officially sponsored provincial religious bodies, he had the Tōdaiji (Great East Temple) built in Nara. Housed within the central building of the Tōdaiji was a huge bronze statue, some fifty-three feet in height, of the Buddha Vairochana. The casting of this Daibutsu (Great Buddha) was an impressive technological feat for eighth-century Japan. It was begun in 747 under the direction of craftsmen of Korean descent and, after seven unsuccessful attempts, was completed in 749. In that year the court received news from the northern province of Mutsu that gold had been discovered in Japan for the first time and that several hundred pounds of it were to be donated as gilding for the Daibutsu.

It appears likely that the official who made this report actually

brought the gold over from Korea and offered it to the court in order to gain special favor. Shōmu, however, was overwhelmed with the auspiciousness of the "discovery." To celebrate it he went to the Daibutsu and performed a remarkable act.

Assuming a seat facing northward toward the statue, as a subject would face a sovereign, Shōmu declared himself to be a "Servant of the Three Treasures of Buddhism." In so doing he brought the throne to a crossroads in its history. Kingship in Japan was based on the emperor's claim of direct blood descent from the Sun Goddess; yet sovereigns from the time of Tenji and Temmu had also sought to use both Confucian and Buddhist tenets to strengthen their hold on the throne. It is possible that Shōmu considered making Buddhism the state religion of Japan. But he stopped short of taking the step that might have led to the establishment of a Buddhist church superior to the throne. And never again was a Japanese sovereign to humble himself in the manner of Shōmu to any outside authority or creed.

At the "eye-opening" ceremony for the Daibutsu in 752, during which the statue was symbolically given life by having the pupils of its eyes painted in, all the great dignitaries of the Nara court were in attendance. In addition there were visitors from China, India, and other distant lands and some 10,000 Buddhist priests. It was without doubt one of the grandest occasions in all of early Japanese history.

Near the Tōdaiji, and originally part of it, is an extraordinary building called the Shōsōin. Constructed like an elongated log cabin with its floor elevated high above the ground by large wooden posts, the Shōsōin is a repository of things from the eighth century and earlier. It contains thousands of objects, including paintings, lacquer, glassware, weapons, musical instruments, decorative screens, costumes, masks used in ritual dances, mundane household articles, and a variety of written documents. Many of these things belonged personally to Emperor Shōmu, while others were used in the dedicatory ceremony for the Daibutsu. Among the objects of art, a number are either imports from China or works produced in Japan in imitation of T'ang models; still others show influences from regions as distant as Persia and Greece.

In 749 Shōmu abdicated in favor of his daughter, Kōken, who in turn relinquished her position to a nephew in 757. While in retirement Kōken came under the influence of a faith-healing Buddhist priest named Dōkyō. The relationship that developed between the

former empress and Dōkyō led to one of the most bizarre incidents in Japanese history. In 764 Kōken deposed the emperor, reascended the throne as Empress Shōtoku, and elevated Dōkyō to several high Buddhist and secular positions, including that of chancellor.

So infatuated did she become with Dōkyō that Shōtoku appears even to have considered placing him on the throne. Only the empress's death in 770 brought an end to Dōkyō's overweening ambitions. His downfall was total and pointed up an important fact of political life in Japan during the age of the court nobles: without strong family ties, such as those enjoyed by the Fujiwara, one could not hope to establish a lasting position of power at court. Dōkyō, who had risen from relatively modest provincial origins, was simply no match for the hereditary aristocrats at court who opposed him after the death of his patron.

The Shōtoku-Dōkyō affair came as a severe shock to Nara society. It seems to have been tacitly agreed that women should henceforth be excluded from succession to the throne. (After Shōtoku there were only two female sovereigns, one in the seventeenth and one in the eighteenth century.) At the same time a number of Buddhist priests were removed from positions of political authority and, within a decade or so, the decision was reached to abandon the capital city itself.

It is unlikely that this decision was based solely on the desire to escape what was considered the baneful influence of the Nara priesthood. In any case, the capital was relocated at Heian or Kyoto some twenty-eight miles north of Nara in 794. The move was costly and temporarily disruptive of the functioning of central government; but Heian did possess several advantages over Nara, among them better facilities for river transport to the sea and more direct access to the eastern and northern provinces, where Japanese armies were engaged in a struggle to dispossess the Emishi.

Buddhism during the Nara period is usually discussed in terms of "six sects": Sanron, Kusha, Jōjitsu, Kegon, Ritsu, and Hossō. None of these sects, however, was to find a broad following among the Japanese people. The cosmologically oriented Kegon (Flower Wreath) sect inspired Shōmu and his advisers to undertake construction of the Tōdaiji with its great statue of the Buddha Vairochana and its provincial branch temples, each symbolically represented by a petal of the lotus blossom upon which the massive Buddha sat. Yet by and large the abstruse doctrines of Indian and Chinese metaphysics advanced by the six Nara sects did not appeal to the Japanese people.

The Buddhist sects that were to become most firmly rooted in the soil of Japan were all introduced or propagated in later centuries.

If the Japanese of the Nara epoch were not generally attracted to specific sects, they were increasingly influenced (as revealed in their literature) by the basic tenets of Buddhism: e.g., that this is a world of suffering; that all things are impermanent; and that, in accord with the law of karma, one's present life and fortune are determined by behavior in previous existences. Moreover, they responded directly and wholeheartedly to the great world of continental art which Buddhism brought to their shores. The construction of wooden temples, begun in the seventh century, was continued and accelerated. The Tōdaiji was simply one of a multitude of monastic structures erected in Nara, many of which contain today, like the Shōsōin, priceless sculpture, paintings, and other treasures of the eighth century.

Although many prominent Buddhist priests of the Nara period appear to have been more concerned with political than religious matters, others sought to apply themselves sincerely and unselfishly to their holy calling. The best known was Gyōki, a popular priest who traveled about the countryside seeking converts and helping with public works, such as the construction of roads and bridges. Gyōki was also one of the early proponents of the merger of Shintō and Buddhism through the identification of Shintō deities with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The Sun Goddess was, for example, equated by Gyōki with the cosmic Buddha Vairochana, whose name in Japanese (Dainichi) means, appropriately enough, "great sun."

One reason for the relative meagerness of scholarly and literary output during the Nara period was the continuing problem of how to adapt the Chinese written script to the Japanese language. The court had launched a historiographic project in the late seventh century and, after numerous delays, produced the *Kojiki* in 712 and the *Nihon Shoki* in 720. The former recounts the age of the gods and traces the "history" of Japan from Jimmu to the reign of Empress Suiko, whereas the latter, after covering the same ground, continues the record until nearly the end of the seventh century. (Both works are discussed in the chapter on literature along with the great poetic anthology of the Nara era, the *Manyōshū*.) Of the two chronicles, only the portions of the *Nihon Shoki* that deal with the late sixth and seventh centuries can be considered reasonably reliable history.

The *Nihon Shoki* became the first of six "national histories" of Japan, compiled between the eighth and early tenth centuries. Dis-

continuance of these officially sponsored histories constituted, as we shall see, part of a much broader shift away from continental modes of government, social organization, and culture that occurred in mid-Heian times.

Decline of the Equal Field System

Any discussion of provincial affairs in the Nara period must inevitably center on the decline of the equal field system of landholding. A paucity of sources makes it unlikely that we will ever be able to reconstruct fully the extent to which this system was implemented. We do know that the Taika reformists had never intended to apply the principle of equal field allotments to all people, but only to the great mass of peasant producers. The court nobles were granted a variety of special allotments (rank lands, office lands, merit lands), some of which were tax-free. Moreover, very substantial parcels of land were bestowed on religious institutions, either by the government or by pious individual donors.

The equal field system, then, had an inherent flaw: it was in no sense equal. It appears that the vast inequities in economic wealth that existed between ruler and ruled in pre-Taika Japan were largely perpetuated during the course of reform. A minister at court during the Nara period, for example, might hold several thousand times as much land as the average peasant.

Another difficulty with the equal field system was that it required periodic inspections to maintain the desired balance in basic allotments. Since land was not heritable, it was necessary to repossess the holdings of deceased persons and to make provision for youths as they came of age. The Taika Reform Edict called for inspections every six years, but from the first these proved difficult for the government to carry out. During the eighth century inspections became less and less frequent and by the ninth they were discontinued altogether.

For the peasantry, the most onerous feature of the new land system was the corvée or labor tax, which included recruitment for military service as well as for construction and other work projects. The enlistment of a family head for frontier duty, for example, could result in the financial ruin of the family. Not only was the enlistee required to outfit and supply himself for duty; his dependents were obliged to continue payment of all other taxes in his absence. As a result, peasants from an early date sought to avoid the tax registers and many, in

desperation, even abandoned their fields. By the eighth century we find references to the growing problem of *rōnin* (literally, "wave people")—that is, people who had left their allotted stations in life and who were officially unaccounted for.

One of the means by which the Nara court tried to aid the hard-pressed peasants was to have the provincial governors grant them loans, generally in the form of rice from the provincial granaries, during the periods of shortage between spring planting and fall harvesting. These loans, however, were advanced at exorbitant rates of interest (usually between 30 and 50 percent, but sometimes much higher) and in many cases were even made compulsory by avaricious provincial officials. They became, in practice, simply another form of tax and had the reverse effect of inducing an even greater number of peasants to join the ranks of the *rōnin.*

The tendency was for larger landholders, such as court nobles and religious institutions, to grant private employment to these *rōnin* and, in so doing, to violate the Taika principle of "public people." One of the tasks to which *rōnin* were put was the opening of new fields. The government itself was at first most vigorous in its encouragement of such land reclamation, since it hoped thereby to increase tax revenue. But it soon found that it was able neither to control the manner in which reclamation was pursued nor to assert effectively its claim to dominion over the newly productive lands. Since few peasants had the means to undertake the opening of fields, this profitable task fell largely to others. Among the most active were the emperor's own ministers, who were able to exert strong pressure for permanent title to their new lands and for varying degrees of tax exemption.

The abandonment of fields, most of which were probably absorbed covertly by larger holders, and the increase in *rōnin* among the peasantry caused a steady decline in governmental revenue during the eighth century. At the same time the large-scale acquisition of reclaimed, tax-free lands by court nobles and religious institutions further reduced the national percentage of land fully classifiable as public. By the end of the Nara period the reversion to "private lands and private people" was a marked trend everywhere.

Shortly before the move from Nara, the government had sought to lessen its financial burdens by dismissing a number of nonessential officials. It also responded to voices of discontent in the provinces by reducing corvée labor demands. Finally, in 792, the emperor took the momentous step of abolishing universal conscription and of di-

recting district governors to provide for local policing needs through systems of private militia. It was noted in the first chapter that district governors were usually selected from among the leaders of families long resident in the provinces. The relinquishment of military initiative to these officials even before the establishment of the new capital at Heian had much to do with the later decentralization of rule and the rise of a provincial warrior class.

Heian Japan: Fujiwara Dominance

Heian or Kyoto, the newly constructed city to which the government moved in 794, remained the capital of Japan for more than a millennium (until the Meiji Restoration of 1868). But the Heian epoch of Japanese history is usually taken to mean the period of four centuries from 794 to the year 1185, when a new military government was established at Kamakura in the eastern provinces by the warrior family of Minamoto. The achievement of national power by the Minamoto toward the close of the twelfth century brought to an end the age of the court nobles and ushered in nearly seven centuries of dominance by warrior houses.

Heian was built on much the same pattern as Nara, although the plans called for it to be substantially larger. The western half of Heian, however, was never fully developed, and the modern metropolis of Kyoto consists of the eastern portion of the ancient capital plus that part of its suburbs, mainly in the northeast, to which the city has expanded.

Despite signs of decay in the Taika-Taihō system of administration and land tenure, the government continued to demonstrate considerable vigor in the early years of the Heian period. The emperor responsible for the move to the new capital was Kammu, one of the most forceful sovereigns in Japanese history. As has already been noted, a likely reason for moving the seat of government from Nara was to obtain more direct access to the eastern and northern provinces. Paradoxically, although it was he who had abandoned the system of universal conscription in 792, Kammu now took the initiative in stepping up the military offensive against the Emishi in the north.

During the Nara period the government had tried various methods of dealing with the Emishi, including attempts to force them onto enclosed reservations. Yet toward the end of the eighth century the Emishi rose in revolt and obliged the government to take more strin-

gent measures. Kammu sent expeditionary forces northward in 789 and 794, but the first was badly defeated in battle and the second scored only temporary gains. In 797 the emperor selected as his commander the redoubtable Sakanoue no Tamuramaro and bestowed upon him the commission of *seii taishōgun* (generalissimo for subjugation of the eastern barbarians). Four years later, in 801, Tamuramaro achieved such a resounding victory over the Emishi that they were never again to pose a serious problem to the Japanese nation.

For slightly more than a hundred years, until the death of Kammu in 806, the system of central government set forth in the Taihō Code had functioned more or less as envisioned by its founders. During the ninth century, however, Japanese leaders began to make significant modifications in this system. One reason was their desire to streamline the elaborate and cumbrous Chinese-style structure over which Kammu and his predecessors had presided. Quarrels among Kammu's sons, three of whom followed him on the throne, set the stage for the creation about 810 of two new offices: the Emperor's Private Office (*Kurōdo-dokoro*) to enable the sovereign to issue administrative edicts more directly and with greater security than before; and the Metropolitan Police Board (*Kebiishi-chō*) to assume the function of maintaining order in the capital in the place of the imperial guard units, which had become largely ornamental.

Although these new offices may temporarily have strengthened the position of the emperor, the tendency from this time to bypass or alter the institutions of the Taika-Taihō system had the ultimate effect of diverting real power away from the throne. Significantly, it was a Fujiwara who was first appointed head of the Emperor's Private Office. Throughout the ninth century this family sought to consolidate its position at court, both through the acquisition of formal authority and through marriage ties with the Imperial House. In 858 Fujiwara Yoshifusa had himself appointed regent (*sesshō*) to the child emperor Seiwa (r. 858–76), who was Yoshifusa's own grandson. Heretofore the office of regent had been occupied only by members of the Imperial House. From the time of Yoshifusa and his son Mototsune, who became senior regent (*kampaku*) to an adult emperor, the Fujiwara fashioned the status of *sesshō-kampaku* into a new center of state power.

Several emperors toward the end of the ninth century attempted to check the rise of the Fujiwara by turning for support to ministers from lesser families. The most illustrious of the latter to receive imperial

patronage about this time was Sugawara no Michizane, a former provincial governor who became minister of the right in 899. Later to be revered as one of the great "scholar-officials" of early Japan, Michizane was among the last to rise in official circles more on the basis of personal merit than through family connections. Yet even he was unable to compete for long with the Fujiwara. Accused of participating in a subversive plot in 901, Michizane was exiled to Kyushu and died there two years later.

The long reign of the Emperor Daigo (r. 897–930), whom Michizane served, has been regarded as a golden age in Japanese history. Culturally, Daigo's period was distinguished by compilation of *Kokinshū* (Collection of ancient and modern poetry), the first great officially sponsored poetic anthology, and *Sandai Jitsuroku* (True records of three reigns), the last of the six national histories. Politically, Daigo ruled without a regent, a fact that led later generations to believe that he, in contrast to his Fujiwara-dominated predecessors, exercised power firmly and directly. Yet the Fujiwara were in no sense humbled by Daigo. If anything their position was strengthened by the continuing decline of public administration in the provinces and by their own acquisition of ever larger private estate holdings during the early tenth century.

The first phase in the formation of estates (*shōen*) during the Nara period had been characterized chiefly by the opening of great new tracts of productive land by court nobles and religious institutions. The aim of the latter was to secure full autonomy for their holdings, which they could do through the procurement of documents from the court granting proprietorship in perpetuity, waiver of taxes, and immunity from intrusion by government officials. As the great estates began to take clear, and indeed legal, form by this means in the early Heian period, smaller holders everywhere saw the advantage of joining their lands with those of their powerful neighbors. The practice of commendation, which became so widespread during this second phase in estate formation, was a way both to avoid government taxation and to ensure local protection, which the court's provincial apparatus had shown itself increasingly unable to provide. Commendation required the smaller holder simply to transfer his title in land to an estate. He continued to work his fields as before and, in return for estate protection, rendered a portion of his harvest income—a portion which usually constituted much less of a drain on his resources than the government's triple tax—to his new estate overlord. The average

small holder had between five and seven acres of land which he cultivated with the aid of both his family and various types of farm laborers subordinate to his control. Small holder families that entered estates became members of self-sustaining economic units. They also placed themselves in theory, and largely in fact, entirely beyond the jurisdiction of the central government.

The steady rise of the Fujiwara and the growth of the estate system of landholding brought by the mid-tenth century the evolution of a new state structure that was in many respects similar to the type of loosely federated society which had existed before the Taika-Taihō Reform. Much of the public domain was converted into private estate proprietorships and the flow of tax revenue dwindled to the point where it was insufficient to finance even the minimum needs of government. Meanwhile, the great courtier families—especially the Fujiwara—became enormously wealthy through income from their private holdings in land.

Within several decades of the death of Daigo in 930 the Fujiwara secured absolute control of the court. At the peak of their power and glory under Michinaga, about the year 1000, the members of this family dominated virtually every aspect of aristocratic society in Kyoto. They elevated sovereigns to the throne and deposed them at will. Emperors chosen during the century of Fujiwara supremacy, from 967 until 1068, were almost always children and were invariably the offspring of Fujiwara mothers. In this way the Fujiwara rendered the throne impotent. They also left little authority in the hands of the traditional officialdom of the Department of State. Public affairs in the Heian capital were handled by the regents through private administrative organs of the Fujiwara family. The striking similarity between Soga rule before the Taika-Taihō Reform and Fujiwara political practice in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries suggests the extent to which the Japanese in the intervening succeeding centuries had reversed the T'ang-inspired governmental reforms of the eighth century.

Heian Religion and Culture

The entire Taika-Taihō Reform phase had been infused with the spirit of Buddhism. Yet this great carrier of continental culture to Japan, which the leaders of the Nara period had even envisioned as the new "protector of the state," soon became in China a victim of

the very process of state centralization under the Sui and T'ang that Japan's leaders had so much admired. The revival of empire after centuries of disunity had gradually turned the attention of the Chinese back to Confucian questions of social order and ethical rule and away from Buddhism. The widespread Buddhist persecutions of the mid-ninth century were in part a reaction against a foreign system that Chinese society on the whole no longer needed and in part a deliberate policy to deprive Buddhist temples of the wealth they had accumulated in preceding centuries.

Although Buddhism was thus largely rejected by the Chinese state at this time, it did not suffer a similar fate in Japan, despite general displeasure with the political meddling and unbecoming this-worldliness of the Nara sects. Interference by the latter in court politics was successfully eliminated by the move to Heian; yet no concurrent attempt was made to reduce the sizable holdings in land which they had already acquired. Indeed the Nara temples and later the temples of other sects continued to be among the most prominent and wealthy organizations in the country for another seven centuries or more.

Fundamental to the continued prosperity of Buddhism in Japan was the fact that it had become, by the end of the Nara period, both the principal intellectual system and one of the most important institutional systems in Japanese life. By contrast, Confucianism had not yet established an independent existence in Japan, while Shintō was in the process of being at least partly assimilated by Buddhism, not only through the identification of Shintō deities with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas but also through the practice of merging Shintō shrines with Buddhist temples.

Emperor Kammu had seen the advantage of encouraging the development of a new type of Buddhism at Heian that would be free of the influence of the Nara sects. The man he patronized for this purpose was Saichō (posthumously known as Dengyō Daishi or Great Teacher Dengyō), a priest who had already broken with the older sects and had established his own Buddhist center on Mt. Hiei, a few miles northeast of the new capital. Saichō journeyed to China in 804 and a year later returned to found Tendai, one of the two major sects of Heian Buddhism. He preached the importance of discipline to those who joined his order and inaugurated on Mt. Hiei a rigorous program of training. With court backing, he was soon able to elevate Tendai to a position of first importance in Heian life.

The principal text of Tendai Buddhism was the Lotus Sutra, pur-

portedly the final discourse of the historical Buddha before his death and entry into Nirvana. In this discourse the Buddha informed his disciples that his teaching had until then been concerned solely with individual salvation (the teaching of Hīnayāna or the "Lesser Vehicle"). They were now prepared to know the ultimate truth that all beings had the potentiality to achieve buddhahood or enlightenment (the teaching of Mahāyāna or the "Greater Vehicle"). Saichō labeled the doctrines of the Nara sects inferior—Hīnayāna or, at best, quasi-Mahāyāna—and asserted that only through Tendai could the true universality of Buddhism be known.

Saichō's contemporary, Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi or Great Teacher Kōbō), revered as one of the great culture heroes of Japanese history for his brilliant scholarship and wide-ranging interests, was more indulgent toward the Nara sects and stressed the importance of acknowledging their "partial truths." A member of the same mission to China that Saichō had accompanied in 804, Kūkai returned to Japan to found the Shingon (True Words) sect of Tantric Buddhism at a monastery on remote Mt. Kōya south of the old capital of Nara. Shingon based its claim to Mahayanist universality on the all-embracing nature of its central divinity, the cosmic Buddha Vairochana (the same deity revered in Kegon Buddhism), of whom the historical Buddha was only an earthly manifestation. As a type of Esoteric Buddhism, it placed a premium on the intimate relationship between master and pupil and on the transmission of secret formulae concerning the mysteries of "mind, body, and speech," for proper performance of ritual. Iconography also formed an important part of Shingon practice and it was perhaps this aspect of the new sect that made it most appealing to the aesthetically inclined court nobles.

Kūkai became even more popular at court than Saichō. So eagerly did the nobles embrace his Shingon teachings that the rival Tendai sect soon developed an esoteric branch of its own. In the middle and late Heian periods, however, esotericism began to degenerate. Increasingly men sought to use it simply as a magical means to prolong life and to acquire immediate riches. Moreover, despite the emphasis of both Saichō and Kūkai on monasticism and the need for discipline, the Tendai and Shingon temples (along with those of the Nara sects) began to accumulate large numbers of monks who, although little interested in religious matters, were happy to serve as members of rather undisciplined and motley private armies. Through much of the Heian period these temple armies not only fought among themselves

but, on numerous occasions, marched into the capital to force the government to grant their demands for special ecclesiastic appointments or for choice pieces of land to add to their holdings.

The last official mission to T'ang China was dispatched in 838. Undoubtedly one reason why the government declined to send others after this date was its dismay at reports of growing disorder in China. The Tendai priest Ennin, who accompanied the 838 mission, has left a detailed account in his diary of conditions during the decline of the T'ang dynasty, including a graphic description of the great Buddhist persecutions of 841–45. Yet probably a more fundamental reason for the cessation of missions at this time was that most prominent Japanese no longer felt a particular need or desire to go to China.

The long period of cultural borrowing from the continent, begun several centuries earlier, had at length come to an end. China's impact during these centuries had been great; yet Japan had clearly withstood cultural inundation of a sort that might have obscured its national identity. In certain areas, such as political organization and landholding, the Japanese had already begun, as we have seen, to shift to institutions and practices more in keeping with their indigenous traditions. In other areas, such as literature and the writing of history, they were evolving new styles quite distinct from the Chinese models to which they had long been exposed.

An important development of the early Heian period was the invention of *kana,* a phonetic script consisting of some forty-seven syllabic signs derived from Chinese characters. Until this time the Japanese had been obliged either to write in pure (or their idea of pure) Chinese or to attempt, as had the authors of the *Kojiki* and the *Manyōshū,* to reproduce the sounds of spoken Japanese with a variety of phonetic elements from Chinese. *Kana* (in effect, a reduced and standardized list of such phonetic elements) provided a new and essential freedom of expression for the Japanese; and indeed some of the finest works of Heian literature were to be written within the next century or so almost entirely in this script.

This does not mean that the Japanese abandoned completely their use of the Chinese writing system. Most scholars and officials continued to prefer it to what they considered a rather vulgar device for transcribing the native vernacular. Others sought to use a mixture of Chinese characters (to represent most nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and *kana* (for other words and for the grammatical inflections of Japanese). In fact, it has been this mixed style that has evolved over the centuries into the complex written language of Japan today.

The high point of cultural flowering during the Heian period coincided with the time of greatest Fujiwara prominence under Michinaga around the year 1000. Michinaga, as the emperor's first minister, presided over a small (less than one percent of the national population) and highly inbred group of families at court that constituted an aristocracy extraordinary for its exclusiveness and degree of withdrawal from the outside world. Official contact with the continent had been allowed to lapse more than a century and a half earlier. By 1000 the court had even reduced to a minimum its relations with provincial society in Japan. We know from records of the period, for example, the dread with which the Heian noble faced appointment to a provincial post and his extreme hesitancy to journey even the slightest distance from the capital.

The court noble of Michinaga's time lived in a world enormously remote from us today, not only in time but also in attitudes and behavior; and indeed, when one thinks of the historic Japanese, it is not the court noble who is likely to come first to mind, but the intrepid samurai of later ages. Such qualities as military aggressiveness, austerity of habit, and an exaggerated concern for personal honor, which have characterized the Japanese in their turbulent modern era, were utterly alien to the court nobles of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The latter lived in a world governed by standards of form and beauty. They were passionately concerned with rank and status, which were assigned almost exclusively according to birth and family standing; and they admired nothing so much as the ability to compose a graceful poem, to contrive an elegant costume, or to write in an artistic hand.

It may be charged that these nobles, who troubled themselves scarcely at all with matters of pure intellect or social morality, had a value system that was superficial and false. Yet they have left us a wonderful cultural legacy, especially in the field of literature; and we may well conclude that, in their case, beauty indeed needed no other excuse than itself for being.

Much of the best literature of the Heian period was produced by women, who had little if any training in Chinese and were content to write in the vernacular. A number kept personal diaries; others jotted down miscellaneous anecdotes and impressions. Sei Shōnagon, a lady in waiting, has left a miscellany called *The Pillow Book,* which gives in intimate detail the style of life at court around 1000. But the finest achievement of Heian literature, and in fact the greatest single work in all Japanese literature, was *The Tale of Genji,* a lengthy

novel by another lady in waiting, Sei Shōnagon's contemporary Lady Murasaki.

Murasaki's book deals with the life and amorous adventures of Prince Genji, the son of an emperor by a low-ranking court lady and a model of all the qualities of taste and refinement most admired by the Heian aristocracy. Genji and his friends, who were burdened with few administrative responsibilities, spent their days largely in the search for pleasure and novel experience. They attended countless ceremonial functions, recited poetry endlessly, and moved facilely from one romantic affair to another.

The prevailing mood in Genji's circle of friends was one of subdued melancholy and nostalgia for the passing of lovely things. In later chapters of the book which depict the generation after Genji's, however, we find a growing sense of pessimism, as though the author and through her the principal characters had become acutely aware that their entire world of aesthetic perfection was itself a fleeting phenomenon that could vanish in a moment.

Court Power Struggles and the Rise of the Military

The first serious threat to Fujiwara political hegemony came not from the outside but from within court society itself. For several centuries the Fujiwara had successfully put down every attempt by other families to share in the practical affairs of government. One remarkable thing was their capacity to produce a seemingly endless succession of really first-rate statesmen and of nubile young girls to marry into the Imperial House.

The importance to the Fujiwara of their marital ties to the Imperial House was clearly revealed in 1068 when, for the first time since the ninth century, an emperor ascended the throne who did not have a Fujiwara mother. At the time of his coronation, the Emperor Gosanjō was thirty-five and had been crown prince for some twenty-five years. During this period he had been poorly treated by the Fujiwara and he now determined to check, if possible, their long-standing monopoly of power at court. Shortly after becoming emperor, Gosanjō opened a Records Office (*Kirokujo*) for the purpose of compiling estate documents and establishing criteria to judge their validity. Gosanjō's aim was to assert some kind of general administrative control over the estate system. At the same time he saw the opportunity to place pressure on the Fujiwara, who had many estates that were known to lack such documents.

In 1072 Gosanjō abdicated, possibly to rid himself of the ceremonial burdens of being emperor or possibly because of poor health. In any event he had little opportunity to demonstrate what he might have done as retired emperor, for within a year he died. Gosanjō's son and successor, Shirakawa, also abdicated at an early date, took Buddhist vows (as did many retired emperors), and soon became active in court politics through his Office of the Cloistered Emperor (*Inchō*).

It has traditionally been thought that Gosanjō and Shirakawa deliberately maneuvered to create a "system of cloistered emperors." But in line with a general reversion to the patrimonialist sentiment of a former age, senior retired emperors, rather than reigning sovereigns, had come to be regarded as the true heads of the Imperial House from the early years of the Heian period. They were publically venerated by the throne, and they utilized the equivalent of what later became known as the Office of the Cloistered Emperor for the handling of their personal affairs. Thus no radically new administrative structure was contrived in the late eleventh century to challenge the Fujiwara-dominated court. Rather, the senior retired or cloistered emperors from Shirakawa on assumed political powers in large part as a result of the need to fill a governing vacuum created by the decline of the Fujiwara, who were openly quarreling among themselves and unable to assert the type of firm leadership they had in the past.

The age of supremacy of the cloistered emperors lasted from 1086 until 1156. In one sense the rise of the cloistered emperors meant the re-entry of the Imperial House into competition for political power. But more significantly it brought a broadening of opportunity for new families, especially provincial families, to participate in the business of the court. Among the staunchest supporters of the cloistered emperors were lower provincial officials who had acquired considerable wealth, prestige, and influence in their home regions but who, until now, had had no way to make their voices heard in Kyoto.

Provincial officialdom of the late Heian period included various elements. At the district level most officials continued to be the heads of families that had been in local residence for generations. The existence of such locally based and hereditary officeholders had always been fundamentally antithetical to centralized rule. Moreover the court, by abolishing its military conscription system in 792 and ordering the district governors to organize militia locally, had given

further impetus to the decentralization of national power. Although we know little about the organization of provincial society until the tenth century, it seems very likely that from the beginning of the Heian period, if not before, the district governors and their kind had begun to assume leadership of the warrior bands (*bushidan*) that were to become the fundamental units of the military class of Japan in later centuries.

Appointment to posts on the top provincial level, on the other hand, usually went either to Fujiwara ministers, who were likely to designate deputies to represent them, or to men from lesser Fujiwara branches or from other noble families that simply had no chance to advance administratively in the capital. Some men who went down to the provinces did so with serious intent, performed their duties faithfully and, in a number of cases, remained as local or regional magnates even after their terms of office had expired. Other appointees did not behave so admirably. The dispatch of deputies to the provinces was often simply for the purpose of collecting taxes for personal gain. Appointments were commonly sold and various illegal means were employed to falsify tax records, extend terms in office, and so forth. The high calibre of provincial administration set in the early Nara period had sadly deteriorated by middle and late Heian times.

One important group that went into the provinces as officials during the Heian period was comprised of distant members of the Imperial House. To prevent their numbers from becoming too large and therefore too much of an economic liability to the central government, it became the practice periodically to reduce princes who had no real hope of succeeding to the throne to nonroyal status. Those so reduced were given surnames (the Imperial House itself had none), the most prominent of which were Taira and Minamoto. A number of Minamoto, in particular, remained in the capital; but from at least the early tenth century we also hear of Taira and Minamoto acquiring influence and assuming leadership roles in the provinces. The progenitor of the provincial Taira was Prince Takamochi, who received his surname in 890 and went to the east as the vice-governor of Kazusa Province. In 939 (less than a decade after the Emperor Daigo's supposedly golden age) Taira Masakado, Takamochi's grandson, rose in armed revolt in the eastern provinces and even proclaimed himself the "new emperor." Although Masakado was killed the following year and a nearly simultaneous up-