

Nevertheless, we can discern some of the main outlines of Japan's development in these early centuries. In the first accounts, Japan appears to be a heterogeneous group of communities in contact with China, with one ruling house bidding for Chinese recognition of its supremacy over the others. In one case, the influence of the Chinese ambassador is said to have been the decisive factor in settling a dispute over the succession to the Yamato throne. The kings of Wa, as the Yamato rulers were known, also made strong claims to military supremacy in Korea, which were at times acknowledged by the Chinese court. In the later accounts, the unification of Japan has progressed noticeably. The sovereignty of the Yamato house has been asserted over hitherto autonomous regions, and its government displays many of the trappings of the Chinese imperial structure. On occasion, the Japanese court is rebuked for its pretensions to equality with the Chinese and even for its hinted superiority, as when the Japanese ruler addressed the Chinese, "The Child³ of Heaven in the land where the sun rises addresses a letter to the Child of Heaven in the land where the sun sets."

ACCOUNTS OF THE EASTERN BARBARIANS

HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF WEI (WEI ZHI) CA. 297 C.E.

The people of Wa [Japan] dwell in the middle of the ocean on the mountainous islands southeast of [the prefecture of] Daifang. They formerly comprised more than one hundred communities. During the Han dynasty, [Wa] envoys appeared at the court; today, thirty of their communities maintain intercourse with us through envoys and scribes. . . .

The land of Wa is warm and mild. In winter as in summer the people live on raw vegetables and go about barefooted. They have [or live in] houses; father and mother, elder and younger, sleep separately. They smear their bodies with pink and scarlet, just as the Chinese use powder. They serve food on bamboo and wooden trays, helping themselves with their fingers. When a person dies, they prepare a single coffin, without an outer one. They cover the graves with earth to make a mound. When death occurs, mourning is observed for more than ten days, during which period they do not eat meat. The head mourners wail and lament, while friends sing, dance and drink liquor. When the funeral is over, all members of the family go into the water to cleanse themselves in a bath of purification.

When they go on voyages across the sea to visit China, they always select a man who does not comb his hair, does not rid himself of fleas, lets his clothing get as dirty as it will, does not eat meat, and does not lie with women. This

3. The term *tenshi*, usually rendered as "Son of Heaven," is actually gender neutral; here, in the Japanese case, it refers to Empress Suiko.

man behaves like a mourner and is known as the "mourning keeper." When the voyage meets with good fortune, they all lavish on him slaves and other valuables. In case there is disease or mishap, they kill him, saying that he was not scrupulous in observing the taboos. . . .

Whenever they undertake an enterprise or a journey and discussion arises, they bake bones and divine in order to tell whether fortune will be good or bad. First they announce the object of divination, using the same manner of speech as in tortoise shell divination; then they examine the cracks made by fire and tell what is to come to pass.

In their meetings and in their deportment, there is no distinction between father and son or between men and women. They are fond of liquor. In their worship, men of importance simply clap their hands instead of kneeling or bowing. The people live long, some to one hundred and others to eighty or ninety years. Ordinarily, men of importance have four or five wives; the lesser ones, two or three. Women are not loose in morals or jealous. There is no theft, and litigation is infrequent. In case of violations of the law, the light offender loses his wife and children by confiscation; as for the grave offender, the members of his household and also his kinsmen are exterminated. There are class distinctions among the people, and some men are vassals of others. Taxes are collected. There are granaries as well as markets in each province, where necessities are exchanged under the supervision of the Wa officials. . . .

When the lowly meet men of importance on the road, they stop and withdraw to the roadside. In conveying messages to them or addressing them, they either squat or kneel, with both hands on the ground. This is the way they show respect. When responding, they say "ah," which corresponds to the affirmative "yes."

The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko. She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance. . . .

In the sixth month of the second year of Jingchu [238 C.E.], the Queen of Wa sent the grandee Nashonmi and others to visit the prefecture [of Daifang], where they requested permission to proceed to the Emperor's court with tribute. The Governor, Liu Xia, dispatched an officer to accompany the party to the capital. In answer to the Queen of Wa, an edict of the Emperor, issued in the twelfth month of the same year, said as follows:

Herein we address Pimiko, Queen of Wa, whom we now officially call a friend of Wei. The Governor of Daifang, Liu Xia, has sent a messenger to accompany your vassal, Nashonmi, and his lieutenant, Tsushi Gori. They have arrived here with your tribute, consisting of four male slaves and six female slaves, together with two pieces of cloth with designs, each twenty feet in length. You live very far away across the sea; yet you have sent an embassy with tribute. Your loyalty and filial piety we appreciate exceedingly. We confer upon you, therefore, the title "Queen of Wa Friendly to Wei," together with the decoration of the gold seal with purple ribbon. The latter, properly encased, is to be sent to you through the Governor. We expect you, O Queen, to rule your people in peace and to endeavor to be devoted and obedient. . . .

When Pimiko passed away, a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter. Over a hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave. Then a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed; more than one thousand were thus slain.

A relative of Pimiko named Iyo, a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored. Zheng [the Chinese ambassador] issued a proclamation to the effect that Iyo was the ruler. Then Iyo sent a delegation of twenty under the grandee Yazaku, General of the Imperial Guard, to accompany Zheng home [to China]. The delegation visited the capital and presented thirty male and female slaves. It also offered to the court five thousand white gems and two pieces of carved jade, as well as twenty pieces of brocade with variegated designs.

[Adapted from Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 8-16]

HISTORY OF THE LATTER HAN DYNASTY (*HOU HAN SHU*) CA. 445 C.E.

The Wa dwell on mountainous islands southeast of Han [Korea] in the middle of the ocean, forming more than one hundred communities. From the time of the overthrow of Chaoxian [northern Korea] by Emperor Wu [r. 140-87 B.C.E.], nearly thirty of these communities have held intercourse with the Han (Chinese) court by envoys or scribes. Each community has its king, whose office is hereditary. The King of Great Wa resides in the country of Yamadai. . . .

In the second year of the Jianwu Zhongyuan era [57 C.E.], the Wa country Nu sent an envoy with tribute who called himself *Dafu*. This country is located in the southern extremity of the Wa country. Emperor Guangwu bestowed on him a seal. . . .

Wa was in a state of great confusion, war and conflict raging on all sides. For a number of years, there was no ruler. Then a woman named Pimiko appeared. Remaining unmarried, she occupied herself with magic and sorcery and bewitched the populace. Thereupon they placed her on the throne. She kept one thousand female attendants, but few people saw her. There was only one man who was in charge of her wardrobe and meals and acted as the medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockade, with the protection of armed guards. The laws and customs were strict and stern.

[Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 1-3]

HISTORY OF THE LIU SONG DYNASTY (*SONGSHU*) CA. 513 C.E.

The following extract is preceded by an account of four successive Japanese rulers who asked to be confirmed in their titles by the Chinese court. One of these titles was "Generalissimo Who Maintains Peace in the East Commanding with Battle-Ax All Military Affairs in the Six Countries of Wa, Paekche, Silla, Imna, Jinhan and Mokhan." Wa refers to Japan, and the other five names to states comprising most of the Korean peninsula. On at least two occasions in the fifth century, the Chinese court, while accepting the fealty of the Japanese "king," confirmed his claim to military supremacy in Korea.

Kō died and his brother, Bu,⁴ came to the throne. Bu, signing himself King of Wa, Generalissimo Who Maintains Peace in the East Commanding with Battle-Ax All Military Affairs in the Seven Countries of Wa, Paekche, Silla, Imna, Kala, Jinhan and Mokhan, in the second year of Shengming, Shunti's reign [478], sent an envoy bearing a memorial which reads as follows: "Our land is remote and distant; its domains lie far out in the ocean. From of old our forebears have clad themselves in armor and helmet and gone across the hills and waters, sparing no time for rest. In the east, they conquered fifty-five countries of hairy men; and in the west, they brought to their knees sixty-six countries of various barbarians. Crossing the sea to the north, they subjugated ninety-five countries. The way of government is to keep harmony and peace; thus order is established in the land. Generation after generation, without fail, our forebears have paid homage to the court. Our subject, ignorant though he is, is succeeding to the throne of his predecessors and is fervently devoted to your Sovereign Majesty. Everything he commands is at your imperial disposal. In order to go by the way of Paekche, far distant though it is, we prepared ships and boats. Koguryō,⁵ however, in defiance of law, schemed to capture them. Borders were

4. Yūryaku, 456-479.

raided, and murder was committed repeatedly. Consequently we were delayed every time and missed favorable winds. We attempted to push on, but when the way was clear, Koguryō was rebellious. My deceased father became indignant at the marauding foe who blocked our way to the sovereign court. Urged on by a sense of justice, he gathered together a million archers and was about to launch a great campaign. But because of the death of my father and brother, the plan that had been matured could not be carried out at the last moment. Mourning required the laying down of arms. Inaction does not bring victory. Now, however, we again set our armor in array and carry out the wish of our elders. The fighting men are in high mettle; civil and military officials are ready; none have fear of sword or fire.

"Your Sovereign virtue extends over heaven and earth. If through it we can crush this foe and put an end to our troubles, we shall ever continue loyally to serve [Your Majesty]. I therefore beg you to appoint me as supreme commander of the campaign, with the status of minister, and to grant to others [among my followers] ranks and titles, so that loyalty may be encouraged."

By imperial edict, Bu was made King of Wa and Generalissimo Who Maintains Peace in the East Commanding with Battle-Ax All Military Affairs in the Six Countries of Wa, Silla, Imna, Kala, Jinhan and Mok-han.

[Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 23-24]

HISTORY OF THE SUI DYNASTY (*SUI SHU*) CA. 630 C.E.

During the twenty years of the Kaihuang era (581-600), the King of Wa, whose family name was Ame and personal name Tarishihoko, and who bore the title of Ahakomi, sent an envoy to visit the court. The Emperor ordered the appropriate official to make inquiries about the manners and customs [of the Wa people]. The envoy reported thus: "The King of Wa deems Heaven to be his elder brother and the sun, his younger.⁶ Before break of dawn he attends the court, and, sitting cross-legged, listens to appeals. Just as soon as the sun rises, he ceases these duties, saying that he hands them over to his brother." Our just Emperor said that such things were extremely senseless,⁷ and he admonished [the King of Wa] to alter [his ways].

[According to the envoy's report], the King's spouse is called Kemi. Several hundred women are kept in the inner chambers of the court. The heir apparent

6. At variance with the later claim of the imperial line to be descended from the Sun Goddess.

7. According to Chinese tradition, a virtuous ruler showed his conscientiousness by attending to matters of state the first thing in the morning. Apparently the Japanese emperor was carrying

is known as Rikamitahori. There is no special palace. There are twelve grades of court officials. . . .

There are about one hundred thousand households. It is customary to punish murder, arson and adultery with death. Thieves are made to make restitution in accordance with the value of the goods stolen. If the thief has no property with which to make payment, he is taken to be a slave. Other offenses are punished according to their nature—sometimes by banishment and sometimes by flogging. In the prosecution of offenses by the court, the knees of those who plead not guilty are pressed together by placing them between pieces of wood, or their heads are sawed with the stretched string of a strong bow. Sometimes pebbles are put in boiling water and both parties to a dispute made to pick them out. The hand of the guilty one is said to become inflamed. Sometimes a snake is kept in a jar, and the accused ordered to catch it. If he is guilty, his hand will be bitten. The people are gentle and peaceful. Litigation is infrequent and theft seldom occurs.

As for musical instruments, they have five-stringed lyres and flutes. Both men and women paint marks on their arms and spots on their faces and have their bodies tattooed. They catch fish by diving into the water. They have no written characters and understand only the use of notched sticks and knotted ropes. They revere Buddha and obtained Buddhist scriptures from Paekche. This was the first time that they came into possession of written characters. They are familiar with divination and have profound faith in shamans, both male and female. . . .

Both Silla and Paekche consider Wa to be a great country, replete with precious things, and they pay her homage. Envoys go back and forth from time to time.

In the third year of Daye [607], King Tarishihoko sent an envoy to the court with tribute. The envoy said: "The King⁸ has heard that to the west of the ocean a Bodhisattva of the Sovereign reveres and promotes Buddhism. For that reason he has sent an embassy to pay his respects. Accompanying the embassy are several tens of monks who have come to study Buddhism." [The envoy brought] an official message which read: "The Child of Heaven in the land where the sun rises addresses a letter to the Child of Heaven in the land where the sun sets. We hope you are in good health." When the Emperor saw this letter, he was displeased⁹ and told the official in charge of foreign affairs that this letter from the barbarians was discourteous, and that such a letter should not again be brought to his attention.

[Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 229-232]

8. Actually, in 607, Empress Suiko.

9. Because of the presumptuousness of the Japanese ruler in claiming the title of Child of

NEW HISTORY OF THE TANG DYNASTY (*XIN TANG SHU*)¹⁰

Japan in former times was called Wa-nu. It is 24,000 *li* distant from our capital, situated to the southeast of Silla in the middle of the ocean. It is five months' journey to cross Japan from east to west and a three months' journey from south to north. There are no castles or stockades in that country, only high walls built by placing timbers together. The roofs are thatched with grass. There are over fifty islets there, each with a name of its own but all under the sovereignty of Japan. A high official is stationed to have surveillance over these communities.

As for the inhabitants, the women outnumber the men. The people are literate and revere the teachings of Buddha. In the government there are twelve official ranks. The family name of the King is Ame. The Japanese say that from their first ruler, known as Ame-no-minaka-nushi, to Hikonagi, there were altogether thirty-two generations of rulers, all bearing the title of *mikoto* and residing in the palace of Tsukushi. Upon the enthronement of Jinmu, son of Hikonagi, the title was changed to *tennō*¹¹ and the palace was moved to the province of Yamato. . . .

In the fifth year of Zhenguan [631], the Japanese sent an embassy to pay a visit to the court. In appreciation of this visit from such a distance, the sovereign gave orders to the official concerned not to insist on yearly tribute. . . .

At this time, Silla was being harassed by Koguryō and Paekche. Emperor Gao Zong sent a sealed rescript to Japan ordering the King to send reinforcements to succor Silla. But after a short time, King Kōtoku died [654] and his son Ame-no-toyo-takara was enthroned. Then he also died, and his son Tenchi was enthroned. In the following year [663] an envoy came to the court accompanied by some Ainus. The Ainus also dwell on those islands. The beards of the Ainus were four feet long. They carried arrows at their necks, and without ever missing would shoot a gourd held on the head of a person standing several tens of steps away.

Then Tenchi died [671] and his son, Tenmu, came to the throne. He died, and his son Sōji was enthroned.¹²

In the first year of Xianheng [670] an embassy came to the court from Japan to offer congratulations upon the conquest of Koguryō. About this time, the Japanese who had studied Chinese came to dislike the name Wa and changed it to Nippon. According to the words of the Japanese envoy himself, that name

was chosen because the country was so close to where the sun rises. Some say [on the other hand], that Nippon was a small country which had been subjugated by the Wa, and that the latter took over its name. As this envoy was not truthful, doubt still remains. Besides the envoy was boastful, and he said that the domains of his country were many thousands of square *li* and extended to the ocean on the south and on the west. In the northeast, he said, the country was bordered by mountain ranges beyond which lay the land of the hairy men.

[Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 38-40]

THE EARLIEST JAPANESE CHRONICLES

The great native chronicles of early Japan, the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*) and the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihongi*), were completed as late as the first decades of the eighth century C.E., when Japanese writers were already strongly influenced by Chinese traditions.¹³ It is therefore difficult to distinguish any pure native traditions in these works, nor are they fully reliable as accounts of Japan's early history. Many of the events described are anachronistic, and many of the legends are selected with a view to confirming the religious or political claims of the ruling dynasty. The emphasis on ancestry is already quite apparent, although other evidence indicates that family genealogies were in a very confused state before the introduction of writing and the Chinese practice of compiling genealogical records (see chapter 4).

The following excerpts from translations by Chamberlain and Aston were selected to show what seem to be the most unsystematic and unsophisticated of legends dealing with the age of the gods and the creation of the land. In contrast to the founding myths of the Confucian *Classic of Documents* (*Shu-jing*), which focus on the sage-kings as the founders of civilization and culture heroes, the focus of attention here is on the creative role of numerous gods in the formation of many islands. Again in contrast to the Chinese classic account, which is unicentered and projects a single moral and political authority, the Japanese mythic world is polytheistic, polycentric, nature oriented, and alive with an almost ungovernable spiritual élan, riotous creativity, and irrepressible fertility.

BIRTH OF THE LAND

Before the land was created, there were twelve deities, whose "forms were not visible." Izanami and Izanagi were the last of these, not the first, but they were directed by the

10. Compiled in the eleventh century on the basis of earlier materials relating to the Tang dynasty (618-906).

11. Still the title of Japanese emperors but applied anachronistically to earlier rulers of the imperial line.

13. Footnotes to translations from the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, unless otherwise identified, are those of Chamberlain and Aston, respectively, in some cases abbreviated or adapted to the usage