

PREMODERN JAPAN

A Historical Survey

SECOND EDITION

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31. See Cassandra Adams, "Japan's Ise Shrine and Its Thirteen-Hundred-Year-Old Reconstruction Tradition," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984–) 52, no. 1 (September 1998): 49–60.

32. Hitomi Tonomura, "Sexual Violence Against Women: Legal and Extralegal Treatment in Premodern Warrior Societies," in *Women and Class in Japanese Culture*, eds. Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walshall, and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 91.

33. *Ibid.*, 146.

34. For a short reading on the topic, see Janet R. Goodwin, "Shadows of Transgression: Heian and Kamakura Constructions of Prostitution," *Monumenta Niponica* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 327–368. See also her monograph, *Selling Songs and Smiles: The Sex Trade in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

35. See two studies on early marriage practices: Peter Nickerson, "The Meaning of Matrilocality: Kinship, Property, and Politics in Mid-Heian," *Monumenta Niponica* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 429–467; and Wakita Haruko and Suzanne Gay, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women's History," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 73–99.

36. See Hitomi Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers: Gendering the Flesh in Medieval Japan," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (February 1994): 140–141.

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The Advent and Assimilation of Chinese Civilization

THE INTRODUCTION OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

The fifth and sixth centuries are truly significant for Japanese cultural history because it was during that time that Japan was influenced by Chinese civilization on a massive scale, much in the manner in which the country was subjected to the influence of Western civilization in the nineteenth century. With the introduction of the Chinese writing system and arts and crafts and the infusion of Confucian and Buddhist thought, Japan became a "civilized" nation. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the continental culture and institutions were assimilated by the Japanese. Immigrants from Korea also played a significant role in this process.

The recorded history of Japan starts with the fifth century, for writing was introduced from the continent around CE 400. The historical chronicles that are extant were not compiled, however, until the early part of the eighth century. Consequently, not all of the Japanese accounts of events and conditions between the fifth and eighth century are reliable, but they augment other historical evidence to give us a fuller understanding of Japanese history than we have for the preceding period.

From the middle of the third century to the beginning of the fifth century, there is no mention in the Chinese historical records of any contact

with Japan (due, perhaps, to unstable conditions in China), but fifth-century records mention a number of Japanese missions arriving in China. The Japanese emperors whose names are recorded in these chronicles can be identified as historical figures. The first emperor (referred to as *ô*, or "king," in this period) regarded by many historians as a historical personage is Emperor Sujin, who ruled either circa CE 240 or circa CE 270–290. A number of historians considered him the real founder of the imperial government in Yamato, not the legendary Emperor Jimmu mentioned in the mythologies. But now some historians consider Sujin to have been a mythical figure too.

Only the kings or emperors after the reign of Ôjin (Homuda, who came from Korea), who is believed to have ruled around CE 400, are seen as actual historical figures. Many historians believe that a number of "kingly" chieftains contended for power in the fourth and fifth centuries and that it was not until Emperor Keitai of the early sixth century, who overthrew the dynasty established by Ôjin, that the imperial dynasty, which extends to the present, was established on a firm foundation. It is likely then that there were three dynasties in the Yamato period: one established by Sujin; the second by Ôjin and his son Nintoku; and the last, which persists to the present, founded by Keitai. The imperial dynasty is not an unbroken line from 660 BCE (from the time of Emperor Jimmu) to the present, as the official history books, which presented myths as history during the prewar years, claimed.¹ Still, the Yamato "dynasty" is the oldest extant in the entire world.

Relations with the continent were carried on prior to the fifth century through Korea. Technical knowledge and material goods had previously entered Japan from the continent, but during the fourth and fifth centuries a large number of artisans and craftspeople immigrated to Japan. Some scholars estimate that more than a million Koreans filtered into Japan over a period of two centuries.² Many were fleeing political instability on the peninsula, particularly the chaos caused by the changes in Chinese dynasties. Many others came seeking a better life in Japan. Most integrated with the Japanese people, entering at the top of the society because they brought superior technologies and knowledge with them. The Koreans were especially important in pottery, ceramics, leather working, and metalurgy. Because they were literate in the Chinese orthography, many served as scribes and bureaucrats in the early Yamato government.³

The Chinese who had fled their country after the fall of the Han government and had gone to Korea were again forced to escape the political

turnout there. They arrived in Japan in the early fifth century and were organized into functional communities (*be*) to serve the imperial family.

One of the most significant importations from the continent was the Chinese writing system. No doubt some knowledge of Chinese writing had filtered into Japan before its official introduction, but the chronicles recount that, during Emperor Ôjin's reign, the king of Paekche sent an envoy, Wani, to Japan with a list of one thousand Chinese characters and a copy of the Confucian *Analekts*. The introduction of the Chinese system of writing expanded the Japanese vocabulary tremendously and introduced new concepts to Japanese intellectual world. The introduction of the writing system was an epoch-making event that propelled Japan into a new stage of its history. Henceforth, records were kept, chronicles were compiled, poetry was anthologized. Chinese literature and philosophy came to be studied, and Confucianism, one of the decisive forces in molding the Japanese character and mode of thought, started to establish its roots in Japanese soil. As historian David Pollack has observed, "The Japanese genius for enthusiastically shaping often puzzling disparate bits and pieces of imported 'superior' cultures to its own inductable end is clearly demonstrated in the uses that the Japanese made of Chinese culture throughout premodern history."⁴

Not long after the introduction of Chinese learning to Japan, Confucian values and ideals started to be mirrored in the proclamations and decrees of the Japanese emperors. Confucian virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness were extolled. There was also an emphasis on maintaining proper relationships between ruler and subject and between father and son. The idea that government should be founded upon the moral character of the ruler also entered Japanese political thought. Confucianism did not become deeply embedded in the Japanese way of life and thought until the Tokugawa era, when the ruling family adopted neo-Confucianism as its official philosophy and actively inculcated Confucian moral ideals into the minds of the people. From around the fifth and sixth centuries, Chinese learning and Buddhism constituted the basic ingredients from which Japanese learning and culture emerged and developed.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the second wave of cultural influence from the continent swept over Japan. Again, a large number of Koreans, escaping the political turmoil of their homeland, immigrated to Japan. With them they brought knowledge of medicine, the art of divination, and the calendar.

A far more momentous event was the introduction of Buddhism to Japan during this period. Again, there are indications that some segments of the Japanese society, particularly the immigrants from the continent, were already familiar with Buddhism, but the official introduction and formal adoption of this religion did not occur until the latter half of the sixth century. In either 538 or 552, the king of Paekche presented Buddhist images and scriptures to the Japanese court with, it is said, the following message: "This doctrine is amongst all doctrines the most excellent. But it is hard to explain, and hard to comprehend. . . . This doctrine can create religious merit and retribution without measure and without bounds, and so lead on to a full appreciation of the highest wisdom. . . . Every prayer is fulfilled and naught is wanting."

Whether to adopt the new religion became a matter of major political controversy at the imperial court. At that time, there were two powerful factions competing for power. One group was led by both the Mononobe family (in charge of arms) and the Nakatomi family (in charge of religious affairs). The other faction was headed by the newly risen Soga family, which was responsible for financial affairs. The former, representing the conservative faction, opposed the adoption of the new religion, while the latter, representing the new power bloc, favored it. Following a series of intrigues and open clashes, the Soga faction crushed the Mononobe and Nakatomi families in 587, and the adoption of Buddhism was officially sanctioned. Thus, even the religion that was to play a vital role in molding the Japanese culture and character was initially a pawn in the struggle for power and influence.

BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded in the sixth century BCE in northern India by Gautama Buddha, who, distressed by the human suffering and misery that he saw around him, set out to discover a way to free his fellow humans from their suffering. After years of searching for the answer to his quest, he attained "enlightenment" and formulated what he believed to be the true principles of life, known as the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. First, he taught that life is full of sorrow: birth, disease, old age, and death are misery. The second principle that the Buddha taught was that the cause of all this misery is desire. The craving of the self to satisfy its ego⁶ results in the perpetuation of the cycle of birth-death-rebirth and, therefore, in endless misery. Third, the only way to break this cycle and end suffering is

to free oneself from this craving, that is, to extinguish the ego. Finally, this is accomplished through an eightfold path that entails adhering to right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Right views consist of understanding the nature of reality, that is, the truth that life is in a constant state of change and flux, and nothing is permanent or absolute. The phenomenal world is only an illusion; there is no absolute reality behind it. Neither the soul nor the self is an absolute entity. The self is actually an ever-changing composite of psychological states; part of a stream of universal consciousness. What persists after death is not the soul but karma, the result of our deeds. It is our ignorance that leads us to believe that we are individual entities and that causes us to crave satisfaction of our selfish impulses. By following the eightfold path and gaining self-mastery and self-knowledge, the sense of the self is extinguished, and the state of nirvana is attained.

Because the Buddha never clearly explained what the state of nirvana is and because the exact nature of the eightfold path is open to varying interpretations, many different Buddhist sects came into existence. But Buddhism can be divided into two major branches: Mahayana, or the Greater Vehicle, and Hinayana, or the Lesser Vehicle. The adherents of the latter group prefer to be called Theravada Buddhists, or the followers of the Way of the Elders. Although Buddhism eventually declined in India, it spread to other parts of Asia and flourished as one of the major religions of the world. Theravada Buddhism spread into Southeast Asia, while Mahayana Buddhism extended into China, Korea, and Japan. The former stresses the attainment of the state of nirvana through self-knowledge and self-mastery, whereas the latter offers salvation with the help of bodhisattvas, merciful Buddhist deities who have attained enlightenment but have postponed entrance into the state of nirvana to help those who are incapable of gaining salvation by themselves.

As we noted, Buddhism was adopted officially in Japan because of the triumph of the Soga family over its political rivals. Buddhism's beneficence, the chronicles record, was judged in terms of its ability to outdo the indigenous deities in controlling the forces of nature, but no doubt the ruling class was most impressed by the learned scriptures and beautiful artifacts that accompanied the religion. In the early period of its adoption, Buddhism appealed only to a small elite, who either took a scholastic interest in its scriptures or were interested in its more esoteric and ritualistic aspects. The common folk were at first largely unaffected by the new religion, but

as Buddhist temples and monasteries began to be constructed, not only in the seat of the imperial government but also in the outlying provinces, the impact of Buddhism upon the lower classes began to grow. Joan Piggott suggests that the building of temples created what Clifford Geertz calls the "theater state," that is, legitimization of the imperial state by pageantry, ritual, and the building of impressive public monuments.⁷

PRINCE SHŌTOKU

After Buddhism was officially adopted in Japan, it found a powerful and enthusiastic supporter in the person of an exceptionally able leader, Prince Shōtoku Taishi (574–622), who exercised authority as regent to the Suiko Empress from 593 until his death. This was a continuation of the dual male-female sharing of imperial power; Suiko was his aunt.

There was an urgent need to reorganize the government and strengthen the position of the imperial court. The leading clans had ensconced themselves in the central government and had begun to overshadow the imperial authority. Moreover, the rivalry among the leading families was undermining the stability of the government. Also, in the provincial areas the clan chieftains and the provincial governors appointed by the imperial court were beginning to act independently of the central government, usurping the right of taxation and extending their power by seizing the lands of their weaker neighbors. There is some evidence to indicate that the general disorder of the period was caused in part by the rise in population and the consequent struggle over existing resources.

To deal with this situation, Prince Shōtoku, in cooperation with the Soga family, initiated certain changes. Hoping to end the hereditary control of top government posts by the entrenched elite families and allow men of ability to rise to positions of importance, he established a table of ranks. There were to be twelve grades for government officials. Unlike the old Kabane noble ranks, the new system granted rank to individuals and was not to be inherited. Reflecting the Confucian influence, senior and junior ranks entitled "virtue," "benevolence," "propriety," "good faith," "righteousness," and "wisdom" were created. In theory, men of talent were to be appointed to these ranks and assigned appropriate government positions.

The prince also promulgated in 604 what is known as the Constitution of Seventeen Articles.⁸ It is not a constitution as we ordinarily understand the term, that is, a document that defines the structure, functions, and powers of the government. Rather, it is a set of moral injunctions that

were intended to serve as guiding principles for government officials. These moral injunctions were meant to strengthen the authority of the imperial family. Article III states, "When you receive the imperial commands, fail not scrupulously to obey them. The lord is Heaven, the vassal is Earth. Heaven overspreads, and Earth upbears." Article XII decrees, "Let not the provincial authorities . . . levy exactions on the people. In a country there are not two lords; the people have not two masters. The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country."⁹

The Confucian influence on its framers is discernible throughout the entire constitution. The Confucian ideals of propriety, good faith, harmony, and so on are upheld in different passages. The Legalist viewpoint is seen in this document in its emphasis on properly meting out rewards and punishments.¹⁰ As one might expect, Buddhist precepts are also embodied in the document. Article II, for example, reads, "Sincerely reverence the three treasures. The three treasures, *viz.* Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood, are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries."¹¹

Throughout most of Japanese history, an aversion to dictatorial rule prevailed. This is reflected in Article XVII of the constitution: "Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many." This injunction did not immediately produce significant changes in the government, but it provided the basis for later attempts to centralize political power.

Prince Shōtoku and the reformers who followed him not only adopted the Chinese view that the emperor was the supreme ruler possessing the sanction of heaven but went further and equated him with heavenly power itself. Being the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess, the emperor was not a mere mortal who received the Mandate of Heaven—a mandate that the Chinese emperor received because of his superior moral character—but was a living god.

Around this period or soon after, the emperor came to be referred to as Aketsu-mikami (manifestation of kami, or god) or Arakito-gami (kami appearing as man). Thus, although Confucian concepts were imported into Japan, the Japanese did not speak of the Mandate of Heaven, a basic principle in Confucian political philosophy. In a way, the military rulers (shōgun) who emerged later were the ones who received the Mandate of Heaven, that is, the imperial mandate to govern on behalf of the emperor. Consequently, although they became the real wielders of power, they never eliminated the emperor; they continued to pay lip service to him as if

he were the true sovereign. The emperor was necessary as the symbol of heaven, and his outward approval, or even tacit consent, was indispensable to the shōgun.

It was also during Prince Shōtoku's time or slightly later that the term *tennō* (heavenly prince) came to be applied to the emperor, rather than the terms *ō* (king) or *ōgimi* (great lord) used until then. The term *tennō* was also imported from China; its first use is found in the *Shih Chi* [*Historical Records*], written by the great Chinese historian Sima Qian (known also as Su Ma-chien in the old Wade-Giles transliteration system) in the first century BCE.¹²

Efforts to broaden contact with China continued during Prince Shōtoku's regency and after. Embassies to the courts of Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) were dispatched, and students and monks were encouraged to travel to China to study its religion and culture. Sixteen missions were sent to China during the Tang period.

THE TAIKA REFORMS

The imperial court's efforts to strengthen the authority of the central government failed. The reformers' hope of weakening the position of the entrenched elite families was not fulfilled because the new table of ranks failed to replace the old Kabane system as the basis for power and status in the government. In the provinces, leading clans continued to extend their landholdings at the expense of weaker clans and to poach on public lands and forests. At the center, the Soga family, which steadily gained in power after their victory over the Mononobe and Nakatomi families, had fastened a firm grip on the government and began behaving in an arbitrary fashion, controlling the succession to the imperial throne. It appeared as if they might even usurp the sovereignty of the imperial family. Consequently, their opponents awaited an opportunity to oust them and to effect a general reform to strengthen the authority of the imperial court.

The situation in Korea also caused the political leaders in Japan to feel the acute need to strengthen the powers of the central government. Korea, it appeared, might fall under the control of Tang China. If this were to happen, Japan's security would be endangered. The Sui dynasty had invaded Korea three times during the second decade of the seventh century in an attempt to bring the kingdom of Koguryo under its control. These invasions had failed, but in 644 the founder of the Tang dynasty led a huge army against Koguryo. Japan's old antagonist, Silla, cooperated with the

Tang authorities and attacked Koguryo and Paekche, hoping to establish its hegemony over all of Korea with the aid of the Tang forces. Japan sent an expeditionary force into the Korean peninsula to aid Paekche, but the Japanese forces were defeated in 663 at Paekchi on. This had an important impact on Japan's relations with the continent because it undercut the close political ties Japan previously had with Korea. It also affected internal politics significantly. The possibility that the Tang government might invade Japan after bringing Korea under control alarmed the Japanese court and touched off a reform movement to strengthen its internal political foundation.

In 644 the foes of the Soga rallied around Prince Naka-no-Ōe (626–671), who later became Emperor Tenchi, to liquidate the Soga family. A leading figure in this coup was Nakatomi-no-Kamatari (611–669), a descendant of the foes of the Soga family at the time of the Buddhist controversy. Part of his reward for his support was that he was allowed to found the powerful Fujiwara family that was to dominate the imperial government for the succeeding four centuries or so.

With the removal of the Soga, the new ruling clique set about initiating political, social, and economic reforms. The object was to strengthen the imperial authority and weaken the influence of the powerful families entrenched in the outlying regions.

The series of reforms started by Prince Naka-no-Ōe and his supporters is referred to as the Taika Reforms, after the era name they adopted.¹³ An edict was issued in 646 calling for reforms, but not all changes were implemented immediately; they extended into the next century. In 702 the Taihō (Great Law) Code, a compendium of penal laws and administrative practices, was written. This was a codification of all the administrative and legal changes that had been implemented or had been under preparation since 646. The reformers looked to Tang China for their models, though they did not, of course, introduce exact replicas of Tang institutions and practices. For the sake of convenience we can consider the changes listed in the Taihō Code as the major aspects of the general reform movement labeled the Taika Reforms.

The initial step taken by Prince Naka-no-Ōe and the reformers was to reaffirm the supremacy of the imperial authority. "The imperial way," they asserted, "is but one. But in this last degenerate age, the order of Lord and Vassal was destroyed. . . . Now, from this time forward . . . the Lord will eschew double methods of government, and the vassal will avoid duplicity in his service of the sovereign."¹⁴

The central government was reorganized. The offices of the great omi and the great muraji were abolished and replaced with the minister of the left, the minister of the right, and the minister of the center. The last of these served as the personal adviser to the emperor and consequently was the most important government official. Initially Nakatomi-no-Kamarari held this post. Under the Taihō Code, the occupant of this post was made the highest administrative officer and was called the *dajō daijin* (chancellor). He presided over the Dajōkan (Grand Council of State), which included the minister of the left and the minister of the right. The former was in charge of all the administrative departments and the latter served as his deputy. The office of *dajō daijin* was frequently left open, in which case the minister of the left usually served as the chief administrative officer.

Under the Dajōkan there were eight ministries or departments: Central Administration, Ceremonial, Civil Affairs, People's Affairs, War, Justice, Treasury, and Imperial Household. An Office of Deities (*Jingikan*), having precedence over the Dajōkan, was created to manage indigenous rituals at the court.

In local administration, the country was divided into sixty-six provinces, which were subdivided into 592 counties, which were in turn broken down into townships consisting of fifty households each. Provincial governors appointed by the central government were instructed to prepare registers of all the free and unfree subjects of the land and to investigate the titles of the clan chieftains claiming landownership and authority in their districts. Armories were to be built, and all weapons in the possession of private persons were to be stored in them.

These local reforms did not, however, spell the end of the authority of the clan chieftains; many were appointed governors of the provinces where they were entrenched. Generally speaking, the county heads were also chosen from among former landowners and clan leaders. Despite its desire to do so, the imperial government was not in a position to uproot all the vested interests in the outlying areas.

The reforms, however, did spell the end of women in government offices. Within the Chinese Confucian political philosophy, misogyny was firmly entrenched. Previously, women served in the imperial court, especially as managers. They were indispensable as liaisons between the emperor and the Women's Quarters. In the era when women were emperors, women served as conduits between the male and female halves of the imperial court.

Many historians claim that the political disturbances caused by Kōken, the last female emperor during the era (749–758), ended the possibility that women would serve again and thereby politically disenfranchised all women. She later served again as emperor, changing her reign name to Shōtoku (764–770). Her alleged dalliance with a charismatic Buddhist priest, Dōkyō (700–772), who tried to become emperor has been cited as an example of women being too emotional to be entrusted with the throne. Piggott dismisses the assertion, noting that, more than anything, the political crisis was not of her making but rather the result of dissension at court over imperial succession.¹⁵

With the Taika-Taihō Reforms, only men were allowed to serve in the government. Each office came with a land grant to finance the position. Many offices became hereditary and so that land became in effect private property. Although women could still inherit, possess, and alienate property, they could not add to their estate by virtue of political position, compounding the tragedy of their removal from politics.

The provincial governors were given the power to levy taxes, but initially they did not have judicial authority. This remained in the hands of the county heads. The people, however, had the right to appeal the decisions of the county heads to the central government. The provincial governors' term of office was limited to about six years, but the county heads held lifetime tenures, and their sons frequently succeeded them. Consequently, they were able to develop and protect their interests in their respective counties.

The *be*, or functional communities, were abolished as part of the effort to undercut the strength of the major clans. This did not mean that the members of the corporations were made free and independent. Instead of being under the direct control of the clan chieftains, they were now under the authority of the imperial government.

In the economic realm a significant attempt was made to change the nature of land tenure. Again following a practice of Tang China, where a policy of maintaining equal landholding prevailed, the Taika reformers sought to equalize landholding in order to weaken the power that the clan chieftains exercised over the land and people under their control. For this purpose all land in the country was to be nationalized. To set an example, Naka-no-Ōe transferred his land and workers to the public domain in 646 and asked other property holders to follow suit. They did so without much resistance because they were usually appointed governors of the areas in

which their interests lay. Thus, although in theory they derived their authority from the imperial government, in reality they managed to retain their former privileges and interests. Moreover, the plan to nationalize all land was not put fully into effect. Important clansmen were allowed to hold a certain amount of land, commensurate with their rank and position. By special fiat the emperor also created tax-free estates for privileged members of the court or aristocracy.

The nationalized land was to be redistributed among the people. For this purpose a census was taken, and population registers were compiled. Everyone except slaves,¹⁶ who were given smaller allotments, was to be given an equal share of land: 2 *tan* (1 *tan* was 30 paces long by 12 paces wide) for each male over the age of six and two-thirds that figure for each female. Individual families, however, did not have independent control over their land allotments. The family allotments were incorporated into communal holdings under the jurisdiction of local leaders. Members of the imperial family and nobility were entitled to larger allotments, from 16 to 160 acres, depending upon rank. Every six years a general redistribution was to be effected to ensure continued equality in holding.

An additional inducement for the land-reform program was the government's desire to increase its revenue by bringing private estates into the public domain. Consequently, at the same time the new land policy was introduced, taxation was systematized, and a tax of 2-3 percent of the harvest was instituted. Estates held by monasteries and shrines, however, were exempt.

Although the land tax was fairly light, there were other forms of taxation that added to this burden. Each adult male was required to contribute to the government a fixed amount of such goods as silk and hemp fabrics. All citizens had to perform *corvée* (unpaid labor as a "tax" in return for the use of the land) for both the central government and the local authorities. The amount of labor exacted by the former was normally ten days a year but could be extended up to forty more days. When labor services were not needed, the government asked for contributions of produce instead. The provincial governors could demand up to sixty days' service each year. In addition to the regular *corvée*, construction work on special projects such as the temples, shrines, and public buildings was required.

The Taihō Code also instituted military conscription. One-third of all males between the ages of twenty-one and sixty were required to serve from one to three years in the army. Their own families decided who was required to serve. While the recruits were in the army, they were obliged to

provide their own weapons, food, and other necessities. The cost to their families was prohibitive. Archery training and horse riding was very time consuming and prohibitively expensive. The conscript militias did not fare very well when pitted against the nomadic *emishi* who were in effect "professional" soldiers. Because of its ineffectiveness, the conscript army was abandoned in 792. We shall see that the long-term effect on the society would be enormous.

In theory, the Taika Reforms opened government posts to men of ability and merit, but high government positions were still closed to men low in the newly established system of court ranks. A person's standing in this system depended upon his family background or upon his success in examinations taken after attending the government college. The practice of choosing officials by means of examinations was also imported from Tang China, but in Japan the college was open only to children of government officials, limiting government service to family members of the governing clans. As a result, the new system did not in reality provide for "a career open to talent." The ruling class was determined to preserve the hereditary governing caste. In 682 the emperor issued an edict stating, "Let the lineage and character of all candidates for office be always inquired into before a selection is made. None whose lineage is insufficient are eligible for appointments, even though their character, conduct and capacity may be unexceptionable."¹⁷

Another practice borrowed from China was the establishment of barriers (*sekisho*), checkpoints in strategic places to restrict the movement of people. It proved particularly useful in controlling peasants fleeing the tax collectors.

The establishment of a permanent capital was another practice adopted from China. In 710 Nara was selected by the ruling family as the site of the new capital. Prior to this, the location varied with each emperor because his residence became the center of government. Because death was regarded as defiling, no emperor resided in the house of the former emperor. As a result, no permanent seat of government came into existence. Many scholars also note that because of the prevailing uxorial customs, scions were raised not with their fathers but with their mother's folks. It became customary for the new emperor to move the "capital" to his maternal family's "palace" rather than move to his dead father's place. In addition, his imperial career was much easier to protect within the bosom of his natal family than it would have been to move to the old palace, where potential rivals lived.¹⁸

A previous attempt to establish a permanent capital was at Fujiwara, which was laid out on a grid system in the Chinese manner. The palace was located in the northern area of the plat, and the higher one's status, the closer one was allowed to live in relation to the palace. Fujiwara almost ceased to exist, however, when the city was dismantled and the building materials were used to establish Nara.¹⁹

For the first time there was to be a capital city. This had a double significance because prior to this time hardly any Japanese community could have been called a city or even a town. Now an elaborate city and capital—modeled after the Tang capital of Xian, although only half its size—was constructed. It was laid out in checkerboard fashion with the imperial court placed at the center of the northern end of the city. A major thoroughfare, about 280 feet wide, ran through the center from north to south, dividing the city into two parts. One aspect of the layout of the Chinese capital that the builders of Nara did not adopt was the practice of building a wall around the city. At this time the Japanese were evidently less security conscious than the Chinese. Perhaps they also abhorred the idea of cutting the city off from its natural environment. Public buildings, residences for the aristocracy, and many Buddhist structures were built in Nara, which became the center of political and cultural life in Japan from 710 to 784. The population at its peak is estimated to have reached 200,000. The years in which Nara was the capital are known as the Nara period.

The objectives of the Taika reformers were not fully attained and the changes introduced were not thoroughly implemented, but the imperial institution was strengthened and the authority of the central government was fortified. The emperor was endowed with greater prestige and dignity. The central government's administrative organs were systematized, and its control over provincial and local areas was strengthened by eliminating the *be* and nationalizing the land. In theory, the people and the land were now in the public domain, not the private possessions of the clan chieftains. The systems of taxation and compulsory service and the penal code were all designed to strengthen the central government's control over the populace.

The power and prestige of the prominent clans, however, were not diminished. The uji leaders were now incorporated into the top rungs of the central government's new bureaucracy as high officials or as provincial and county governors. They retained the privilege of collecting the taxes from the areas to which they were assigned. Moreover, they were paid generous stipends, were exempt from taxation, and were given special consideration

in the enforcement of penal laws against them. The status and privileges of the officials of the upper ranks were inherited by their children. Thus, the leading families retained their special status. In addition, they were acquiring a strong cultural tradition, which gave them a further advantage over the common folk; they were becoming a cultural as well as a political aristocracy.

At the beginning of the eighth century, the number of officials occupying the higher ranks of the bureaucracy is estimated to have been no more than 125 men. They held the highest offices in the central government and served as governors of the key provinces. In addition, approximately ten court aristocrats were involved in decision making at the very top level. These two groups constituted the elite—politically, socially, economically, and culturally. The gap between the aristocracy and the common people was further widened by the fact that the aristocracy tended to remain in the capital and manifested a growing unwillingness to serve in the countryside.

CULTURE OF THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CENTURIES

Chinese civilization had a more lasting impact on Japan in the cultural sphere than in the political and social realms. The art and architecture that came from China were primarily Buddhist in nature, and, as temples and monasteries were constructed throughout the land, the cultural level of the society was greatly enhanced. The shapely, well-balanced tile roofs, the many-storied pagodas, and the vermilion gateways of Buddhist precincts undoubtedly would have made a Chinese or a Korean visitor of this period feel very much at home.

The art of sculpture took root in Japan and flourished rapidly, reaching a level of figural art "never surpassed in the Far East."²⁰ The Buddhist structures that were springing up throughout the countryside were embellished with expertly carved wooden images and glittering bronze figures of the Buddha, the Kannon (Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara), and other Buddhist deities. Paintings and frescoes with Buddhist motifs also added new dimensions to the culture of Japan.²¹

The most renowned of the Buddhist edifices was the Hōryūji. The original buildings, constructed in 607, were destroyed in a fire and were rebuilt at the end of the seventh century. Nonetheless, they are believed to be the oldest wooden buildings extant in the world today. The plan of the monastery was patterned after the style of building in the Chinese Six Dynasties (222–589), with a relatively asymmetrical arrangement of the

buildings. The five-story pagoda,²² with its gently curving tile roof, occupies a prominent place in the compound, as does the Golden Hall. The structures convey a sense of order, balance, and cohesion; the pagoda in particular has a stately dignity and grace. The buildings use the Chinese bay system, a modified version of post-and-lintel construction employing intricate bracketing designed to transfer the weight of the heavy tile roof down through the wooden parts into the main columns that support the structure. The interior of the buildings is adorned with Buddhist frescoes and wooden and bronze statues.

The construction of Buddhist monasteries was given further impetus by Emperor Shōmu (701–756), who ordered them to be built in all sixty-six provinces as a partial religious response to the smallpox epidemic that was ravaging the land. Historian Conrad Torman observes, “Japanese monument builders, like their counterparts in other societies, were well aware that awe-inspiring edifices help sustain the prestige and well-being of one’s cause by promoting a sense of awe, envy, and even inferiority in those one is seeking to influence.”²³

In Nara itself, the Tōdaiji temple, where a great bronze Buddha more than fifty feet tall is housed, was constructed in the middle of the eighth century. The Great Buddha sits on a lotus petal with his right hand signifying “fear not” and his left hand making a boon-bestowing gesture. The Tōdaiji complex is much larger than Hōryūji, occupying about twenty acres. The columns, bracketing, and other architectural elements are also more elaborate and massive. The several halls house innumerable Buddhist images—made of dry lacquer, clay, wood, and gilded bronze—patterned after early and middle Tang styles. The cost of building Tōdaiji was enormous: 51,590 persons donated lumber, and 2,179,973 persons donated their labor.²⁴ The ecological cost was also very high. Thousands of old-growth trees were felled for lumber; the resulting clear-cutting of forests caused extensive erosion. The imperial government was greatly worried, so it began a number of programs intended to preserve the available timber stands. But after a few years the building boom began again.²⁵

The Shōsōin, where more than 6,000 objects from this era are housed, was also built in the Nara period. Among the treasures stored here are the oldest printed manuscript extant in the world, brocades, silk fabrics, screen panels, musical instruments, mirrors, bowls, ivory works, lacquerware, dance masks, and weapons. Many of these were imported from China. Some items show traces of Eastern Roman, Persian, and Indian influence. Evidently, objects from distant areas had found their way to Japan. The

articles stored in the Shōsōin are still in excellent condition because the log construction “breathes with the seasonal changes in humidity, keeping out the damp and allowing the dry air of late summer and fall to circulate freely.”²⁶

Buddhism was still restricted largely to the aristocracy during this period. The abstruse philosophy was beyond the comprehension of commoners. In fact, both upper and lower classes together were attracted more to the pomp and ceremony of the rituals, the glitter of the benevolent and merciful-looking images, and the special powers that they believed the Buddhist gods possessed than they were to Buddhist doctrine. In a way, Buddhism was regarded as a magical cult. The people prayed to the Buddhist deities to give them good fortune, good health, and prosperity and to ward off the evil spirits. They also prayed to the deities to help them escape the pains and miseries of life as well as the many hells that popular Buddhism envisioned.

With the arrival of monks from China and Korea, however, a small circle of specialists began studying the religion seriously. Six Buddhist schools arose during the Nara period, but none became a major movement. Three became extinct, while three have survived to the present with only a small number of adherents. The largest of these, the Hossō school, aimed at discovering the ultimate reality of cosmic existence through the investigation of the specific nature of all existence and a mystical apprehension of the nature of the soul. The second, the Kegon Sect, sought communion with the Buddha (who embodies the cosmic soul) and, through him, communion with all beings. The third, the Risu school, emphasized monastic discipline and the mystical concepts embodied in the mysteries of the initiation ceremonies.

Some Buddhist priests were not content merely to engage in scholastic or mystical activities but sought to spread the word among the people and to do good works by building roads and bridges into previously inaccessible areas. The most notable of these missionaries was a monk named Gyōki (668–749), who was first condemned as a rabble-rouser and preacher of false doctrines but was later honored as a high priest.

The native religious cults retained the following of the masses, but increasingly they began to pale next to Buddhism because they had no priestly caste, no elaborate moral code, and no heaven or hell. Neither could they match the glitter and glamor of the Buddhist artifacts and rituals. Moreover, the wealth and profundity of Buddhist teachings greatly overshadowed the native cults. As a result, even at this early stage attempts

were made by what eventually became known as the Shintōists to reconcile their traditional beliefs with Buddhist concepts so as to enhance the nativist spiritual and intellectual standing. This kind of syncretism did not take concrete form until the following centuries, however. Like the Chinese, the Japanese did not demand exclusive loyalty to any one religion; a person could worship at both a shrine and a Buddhist temple. Thus, the indigenous cults and Buddhism coexisted peacefully.

Perhaps an even more significant cultural development of this period was the emergence of a native written literature. At the beginning of the eighth century, the mythologies and legends concerning the founding of Japan, which had been transmitted orally down through the ages, were transcribed in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*.²⁷ Both works were patterned after Chinese chronicles and contain a number of stories that are not part of the indigenous tradition.

The compilation of these histories was started in the 670s as a project to revise and expand two earlier accounts, one a genealogical record of the imperial family and the other a collection of old tales. These two histories, it is conjectured, were written in the sixth century, but neither has survived. Their existence is known only because they are mentioned in the *Kojiki*. It is believed that, in addition to oral tradition and the two earlier works, the *Nihongi* and the *Kojiki*²⁸ were based on Chinese and Korean sources. Accounts of political events prior to the sixth century are considered to be unreliable because the historical record was commissioned by Emperor Temmu (who reigned from 673 to 686) to justify and glorify his dynastic lineage. The truism that "history is written by the victor" applies here. Political rivals such as the Soga family are depicted negatively. The official accounts formulated in Temmu's reign were incorporated in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. The *Kojiki* consists primarily of mythological and legendary tales and contains very little that might be regarded as historical. The *Nihongi*, however, focuses more on history proper, and its coverage extends to CE 697. As noted above, its accounts of earlier years are questionable, but accounts from about the sixth century are considered to be fairly accurate, although they are still embellished with materials taken from Chinese and Korean, especially Paekche, sources.

Although they are not entirely reliable as historical documents, as records of myths and legends of early Japan, the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* are significant. For one thing, they aided in establishing the tradition that claimed a divine origin for the imperial family. Partly because of the sanctity and authority conferred upon it by these accounts, the imperial family

was able to maintain its special status above the rest of the society. These records became authoritative "scriptures" in the modern age when the ultranationalists turned to them to prove the uniqueness of the Japanese national polity.

The *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* symbolized the growing sense of ethnocentrism that is discernible in the seventh century. Japan is viewed in these accounts as a unique land. In fact, it was depicted as being at the center of the universe, and the ancestral god of Japan, the Sun Goddess, was seen as the ruler of the entire world. From around the middle of the seventh century, the term Nihon, "the place where the sun rises," came to identify Japan. Much of the cultural activity of this era sprang from the Japanese desire to rise to the level of China.

Another significant literary accomplishment of this period was the compilation of the *Manyōshū*, a collection of more than four thousand long and short poems from the earliest period—although the majority of the poems anthologized had been composed after the fifth century—to about 760. The collection is invaluable not only for its intrinsic literary merit but because it reflects the moral and intellectual outlook of early Japan. It is noteworthy that it includes poems composed not just by emperors and court nobles but also by nameless plebeians. Korean influence is also present in the anthology. One of the three main poets of the *Manyōshū*, Yamanoë Okura, it is now believed, was a Korean immigrant to Japan.²⁹

Motoori Norinaga, an eighteenth-century authority on the subject, indicated that the outlook that prevails throughout the *Manyōshū* is one of spontaneous, unadorned expression of natural human sentiments—even excessive sentimentality. The Confucian ideals of order, control, and restraint had not yet begun to mold the attitudes of the Japanese. The anthology consists of poems about nature, the landscape, the four seasons, flowers, birds, moonlight, the sorrows and joys of life, and, above all, love. The belief that a man must not lay bare such "unmanly" sentiments as love for the opposite sex, particularly his spouse, had not yet become embedded in the Japanese mind, whereas, by the Tokugawa period, love of wife and children came to be condemned as self-indulgence.

What appear to be Buddhist and Confucian ideas are discernible here and there in the *Manyōshū*. For example, poems seem to reflect the Buddhist view of the ephemeral nature of life. There are frequent expressions of loyalty to the emperor and admonitions that faithful service to him was essential for the preservation of the honor of the family and clan.

The Spartan attitude of the warriors of later years had not come to the fore as yet. A warrior taking leave of his family at the command of his sovereign departs with a heavy heart; nostalgia and longing for loved ones are expressed unashamedly. Indeed, traditionalists claim that the *Manyōshū* embodies the Japanese outlook before Japan was strongly affected by Chinese culture. The influence of Chinese poetry and literature could not be kept out of the literary realm for long, however. In the newly established college and in the provincial schools, the Chinese classics formed the core of the curriculum. The educated soon became well versed in Chinese poetry and literature, and they came to admire and emulate the works of such great Tang poets as Li Bo and Du Fu.

In addition to utilizing Confucian concepts to buttress their political authority, the ruling authorities sought to instill in the people other aspects of Confucian thought. For instance, in 757 the emperor advised every family to keep a copy of the *Xiao Jing* (*Hsiao Ching*, a Confucian discourse on filial piety) and learn its contents. The *Xiao Jing* taught that filial piety forms the foundation of all virtues and that all other teachings must be based upon it.

In other cultural developments, musical instruments, including a variety of wind, percussion, and string instruments, as well as dances, including those in the Indian style, came from the continent.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

In the economic realm, too, the influence of the continent pervaded. Improvements in agricultural tools and cultivation played an enormous part in the development of Japanese society. The first instances of rice agriculture had come from various Asian areas in the second through the third centuries. The short rice hybrid had triumphed over the long grain variety, perhaps because it seemed to be better adapted to Kyushu and southern Honshu weather patterns. At first the "natural rainfall" method of planting was practiced. That is, although the rice was grown in flooded fields (hence the name "wet rice"), farmers did little more than build raised-earth ridges around the field to contain the water. Seeds were sown using the broadcast method, and the plants grew pretty much as they had germinated. Farmers weeded the fields and tried to shoo away birds and perhaps remove some insects, but they did little else until the grains were ripe enough to harvest. Then they used their primitive tools to cut the grain-bearing heads, leaving

the long rice stalks in the field. The grain was stored in sheathes until needed; often standard-sized sheathes were used as money.

With the advent of Korean tools, particularly iron knives, iron-tipped sickles, shovels, and plows, the Japanese were better able to dig deeper and to more readily move earth. At some point they began to dig ditches, weirs, sluices, and other irrigation systems with these tools. No doubt the Koreans who brought these technological advances instructed the Japanese in their use. But they also began to teach other innovations such as the transplantation method. In this method, the available land was divided into equal quarters, and one section was flooded by irrigation before the spring monsoon rains arrived. The quarter-field was used as a seedbed and allowed to grow for a few weeks. In the meantime, the other three-quarters of the area was plowed, fertilized (see more below), and otherwise prepared for the rains. When those fields were flooded by the "plum rains," the seedbed shoots were uprooted, their roots washed and then laboriously transplanted individually into the waiting flooded fields.

Transplantation is a counterintuitive innovation. At that point the seedlings have absolutely no nutritive value for humans. They are little better than green grass. But when transplanted in precise rank-and-file rows (about three inches apart) their roots have the maximum space to grow. The seedlings grow faster and stronger, and they produce twice to three times as much as plants that grow in a haphazard manner. Also, apparently the Koreans showed that by cutting the rice stalk closer to the ground (with long-handled iron-tipped scythes), the stalks could more easily be used to flail the grains and thereby begin the winnowing, polishing, and storage phase of harvest. Koreans later brought harrow teeth and chain-linked flails (*nun-chucks*) that would do this task even better.

The Japanese also began to import buffalo draft animals to plow the fields and to transport materials. Curiously, they were not commonly ridden as transportation and for centuries were not used to pull wheeled carts; perhaps because the Koreans did not teach them such innovations. Later, two-wheeled oxen carts became the transportation of the imperial court. The Japanese did, however, begin to employ the harvested rice stalks as fodder for these animals, along with grasses and other plants that grew in the forests or other upland dry fields. They began to mix cattle droppings into their fertilizer. Because they had to tether the animals to keep them from foraging in the rice fields, it was easier to collect the droppings.

This brings us to a need for a clarification of fertilizer. In the old swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture method, farmers slashed vegetation on hillsides and then burned off areas after the slashed vegetation had dried out. They then planted in those cleared fields. The ash served as a natural fertilizer for a few seasons. When the land lost fertility after a couple of years of growing the same crop, the farmer moved on to another area and repeated the process. The played-out field was allowed to lie fallow for a few years, and then the swidden process started again.

Obviously that works for upland "dry" fields that depend on natural rainfall. It does not work as well for lowland wet-rice fields. Farmers found it necessary to artificially fertilize these fields. "Green" fertilizer that was collected as natural vegetation detritus on forest floors or swamps was tossed into collection pits to be mixed with human feces and other trash and fireplace ash that was allowed to rot or compost. Often, the rice stalks were tossed into the pit as well or plowed under when preparing the ground for the next planting. With the new animal droppings, the compost pit was obviously much enriched. Because the new transplanting system created neat rows of plants, the farmer could now ladle diluted fertilizer (the pure fertilizer was too strong and would burn the plant) directly on the plant, thereby maximizing the benefits.

Other dry-field plants were introduced to Japan from the Asian continent as well. Various strains of wheat, barley, millet, sorghum, and other "lesser grains" could be grown in upland dry fields without the intensive labor required of wet-rice cultivation. These grains were not as productive as rice, which is an inordinately "cost-effective" crop: three to four times as much rice is produced for each seed in comparison to the other crops. The carbohydrate return on rice is much higher than these others as well.³⁰

Naturally, these new plants and tools benefited the Japanese enormously. Nutrition improved tremendously, and, as one would expect, the population increased dramatically. But the spread of disease from Korea and China in many ways undercut the benefits of this agricultural revolution. Scholars have concluded that epidemics swept through Japan like wildfires, sometimes killing thousands. William Wayne Farris suggests that these epidemics hit Japan in waves about thirty years apart. Smallpox, in particular, killed the very old and the very young. Then thirty years after it had died out, another wave hit the new generation that had not acquired a natural immunity.³¹

Medical knowledge and drugs also came from China during this period, and the long tradition of Chinese medicine in Japan was founded. This

included the use of not only herbs but also acupuncture (treatment by needles) and moxibustion (cauterizing with moxa leaves). But medicine in this age, of course, was powerless in face of the periodic epidemics that broke out. The smallpox epidemic of 735-737 killed 25-35 percent of the population.³² Population figures are notoriously inaccurate,³³ but most historians now agree that the population of the Jōmon era was about 120,000. By the end of the Yayoi, because of the introduction of wet-rice and better agricultural methods and tools, it had burgeoned to about 2 million. By the Taika-Jaishō era, it had increased to about 5-6 million. But by 950 CE it had declined to 4.5-5.5 million.³⁴ In addition to the epidemics, some scholars include the environmental degradation caused by two centuries of heavy timber use as contributing significantly to this decline.³⁵ We will revisit this demographic topic when we reach the medieval era.

From the middle of the seventh century, copper, gold, and silver mines came to be exploited more extensively in Japan. Prior to this, most of the minerals used in Japan were imported from Korea. The Ritsuryō Reforms instituted an elaborate hard road system throughout the country. Governors were required to create horse stations along the official roads. As a result, commerce expanded, and markets began to spring up in the major cities. In 708 the government minted its own coins, but a money economy did not develop to any significant extent right away. Rice and fabrics remained the chief mediums of exchange during the Nara period.³⁶

Trade between Japan and the Asian continent remained vital during the era, especially for the import of new technologies. Domestically, most of Japan was a rural, self-sufficient, agricultural economy. Goods were bartered in the provinces, but the tribute tax payments contributed to the development of an important market in Nara and later in Heian-kyō. Lower-ranking bureaucrats traded surplus goods in the capital, at first as barter exchange, but later copper coins from China began to become the medium of exchange. We will deal with the economy again when we approach the late medieval era.

Few people traveled in those days, but those who did could depend on good, sound roads. The governors' *corvée* peasants kept the roads in good repair and maintained horses that could be used by official couriers. Naturally, other travelers used these roads as well, though they had to pay for any help that they required. A few monks on pilgrimages, itinerant entertainers, and merchants took advantage of this innovation. In the Heian era, the government maintained six official roads (with scores of local offshoots). In 836 a government report stated that a total of 402 horse post

stations were maintained, staffed with 3500 horses for the use of official couriers and traveling bureaucrats. The horse relay system was remarkably effective. Messengers could travel the eight hundred kilometers (almost five hundred miles) between Dazaifu in Kyushu to Heian-kyō in about eleven days. The same trip with pack horses typically took twenty-seven days.³⁷

The smallest administrative unit introduced under the Taika Reforms was the township or village, consisting of fifty households. The size of the households varied, but usually they consisted of several small or nuclear families within an extended family. The census records show that one household in central Honshu had 96 members, 59 of whom were slaves. Another in northern Kyushu included 126 members, 37 of whom were slaves.

Although slaves had existed in earlier days, the Taihō Code mentions them as *seminin* (base people, which included other semi-indentured people) and distinguished them from free people (*ryōmin*, or good people). Slaves could be bought and sold, but masters did not have judicial authority over them; slaves who committed a crime were tried by the magistrates. They were expected to work around the house and in the fields and also to perform *convêe* in place of their masters. It is believed that they were not treated too harshly, and their lot was more or less akin to that of household servants of later ages.

Although the Taika reformers adopted the patriarchal concepts of China, in reality it appears that women continued to enjoy a status equal to that of men. Wives had property rights, and women were given court ranks independent of their male relatives. Family life still centered on the mother. In most instances husband and wife lived apart, and the latter kept and raised the children, but the practice of patriarchal control of children was becoming more prevalent in the late seventh century.

Polygamy was still common among the upper class. The emperor had a number of wives, and the Taihō Code made provisions for the emperor to have nine concubines. There were also more than two hundred female attendants serving at the court. Empresses were usually chosen from the emperor's immediate family circle, so close consanguineous marriages frequently took place. The first wife was usually chosen by his parents with political considerations in mind. Otherwise the young people were allowed to choose to marry.

By the Nara period, the aristocracy lived in houses with wooden floors and wooden or tile roofs. The common people, however, still lived in

hovels with dirt floors, thatched roofs, and only primitive household furnishings. They usually went about barefoot, while members of the upper class wore wooden shoes or clogs, which were in use as early as the Yayoi period. Meals were taken only twice a day. Although Buddhism forbade the killing of living creatures and the eating of meat, the proscription was ignored by most of the people, and meat and fish were consumed. But meat was simply too expensive for most people. Animals were not raised for their flesh. Chinese foodstuffs like noodles were introduced and soon became a staple food. Buddhism also introduced the practice of cremating the dead.

MARRIAGE AND GENDER RELATIONS

Historian Hitomi Tonomura has characterized Japanese marriage practices of a later medieval period as "a social process without a name." Indeed, there was no noun form for the institution in the language. "It was a practice free of governmental dictates, or legal definitions and standards . . . the boundary of 'marriage' was negotiated."³⁸

In the imperial court, young men came to the capital to make their careers, but wives stayed in their natal home. The young man's in-laws provided financial backing as long as he represented their interests at court. Inheritance descended through the matriline, children being raised in their mother's natal home. As we shall see, when the court became increasingly more patriarchal with the adoption of Chinese socio-political systems, men began to demand their own (neolocal) homes in the capital, but these were still to be financed by his in-laws.³⁹

Polygamy by both genders was common in the early period, but as time went on, only males were still able to take on "other" wives. Some rich women were able to carry on extramarital affairs, but society began to frown on women taking on "other" husbands. Marital marriages continued on into the medieval period (after the eleventh century), and even in that male-dominated era women still were able to own property and pass on and accept inheritances in their own names.

Because women had long been the shamanic mediums between humans and the spirit worlds, they continued to wield considerable magico-religious power. Within the indigenous (Shintō) cults, they were the herbalist-healers, the exorcists, and oracles. With the advent of Buddhism, many of shamanic women infiltrated that world as well. In the early years many of the Buddhist sects accepted nuns, and very often these women served

important roles between the common folk and the Buddhist establishment. Many female shamans joined the ascetic *yamabushi* (literally "those who live in the mountains") mystics in the hinterlands, performing healing rituals and exorcisms.

Given Japan's early history of female emperors (about a half-dozen in addition to Himiko and Iyo) and shamans, and matrilineal and matrilineal practices, it is not surprising that the status of women was quite high prior to the late eleventh century. Women continued to own property and attain high rank and social position; they inherited apart from their husbands and continued to dispose of their own property even after divorce and the death of husbands and sons. Some women were even allowed to hold imperial and, later, even some warrior offices; most often hiring male relatives to serve as temporary surrogates. The institution of *mukō* by which one "adopts" a son-in-law in the absence of a male heir continues even into the modern period. Women could even "adopt" a daughter (usually a niece or other female relative), marry her to a young man and then "adopt" him as her *mukō* heir!

It was not until the late thirteenth century that women would be dispossessed of their roles and privileges in the medieval era. Historian Wakita Haruko notes, "The Nara and Heian periods may be seen as a transition stage in the development of marriage, with a gradual shift from the wife-visiting to the adopting-a-son-in-law to the taking a wife form of marriage."⁴⁰

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FOES

From the latter part of the seventh century, Japan followed a defensive policy in its relations with Korea, in contrast to the country's earlier attempts to extend its political influence into the peninsula. Korea was now under the control of China and Silla, Japan's traditional foe, a potentially dangerous situation for Japan. Fearing a possible invasion from the peninsula, the Japanese rulers began to fortify northern Kyushu and southeastern Honshu. Indeed, many scholars suggest that the rival uji heads allowed the Yamato a kind of first-among-equals status (which the Yamato parlayed into real political control) in these times of foreign threats.⁴¹

A military defense command was established at Dazaifu in Kyushu. The threat from Korea persisted even after Silla drove the Tang forces out of the peninsula only a few years after they had joined forces to conquer Paekche

and Koguryo. The Japanese maintained their fortifications in good repair and kept a close watch on political developments in Korea.

Toward the latter part of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries, the relationship between Japan and Silla became tense when the latter sent vessels to raid the Japanese coastal regions. In 894 Silla attempted to invade the island of Tsushima but failed. The potential threat of Silla contributed to the consolidation of the martial tradition by compelling the Japanese to maintain military vigilance for nearly four centuries following Silla's destruction of the Japanese outpost in Mimana in 562.

Internal forces—hostile domestic tribes—also kept the imperial government preoccupied with military preparedness. The tribes of Kumaso and Hayato in Kyushu and the Ezo in the north resisted the imperial forces for centuries. The racial origins of the Kumaso and Hayato are not known, but from the early years of the Yamato state the imperial government was compelled to send its warriors against them. The Kumaso tribe disappeared from historical accounts early, but it was not until the beginning of the eighth century that the Hayato were brought under control. By the middle of the seventh century, the Ezo were driven out of the Kantō region and were pushed into northeastern Honshu.⁴² They continued to defy the imperial government, however, which found it necessary to send expeditionary forces against them periodically. Advance outposts were established in the north, and constant vigilance was maintained. The general in charge of the expeditionary troops was given the title *seitaiishōgun*, generalissimo in charge of subduing the barbarians. (After the late twelfth century, this office was used as a stepping stone to exercise military control over the entire land.) In the early eighth century, the northern region was brought more or less under the imperial government's control, although a major campaign had to be launched against the Ezo again at the end of the century. Like Silla, these domestic opponents of imperial authority can be viewed as having contributed to the strengthening of military tradition early in Japanese history.

NOTES

1. See Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. 125–129. See also Cornelius J. Kiley, "State and Dynasty in Archaic Yamato," *Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (November 1973): 25–49.

2. Melvin C. Aikens, "Origins of the Japanese People," in *Japan Emerging: Pre-modern History to 1850*, ed. Karl F. Friday (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 64.