CHAPTER 9

ASUKA AND NARA CULTURE: LITERACY, LITERATURE, AND MUSIC

This chapter deals with the literature and music of Japan during the two centuries between the acceptance of Buddhism in 587 and the abandonment of the Nara capital in 784. These were years of vast and fundamental change in the island kingdom, of cultural forced feeding and vigorous new growth. In particular, they were the years when Japan became fully and for all time a participant in the high civilization of East Asia. Participation meant religious and philosophical orientations, an ideal of imperial rule, legal and administrative structures, techniques and styles of architecture, city planning, sculpture, painting, and music – all derived directly or indirectly from China and shared in one degree or another by the peoples on its periphery. Above all, it meant literacy: the mastery of the Chinese language and the eventual adaptation of its script to the writing of Japanese. From literacy came ventures in historiography – at once a definition and a redefinition of the Japanese state – and in poetry. Emulation of China led the newly literate Japanese to compose verses in Chinese modeled on the ones they found in Chinese anthologies, and it also led them to write down their own songs and to turn the native prosody into high poetic art. The myths, legends, folk and hero tales of the oral tradition were also written down in the first histories and local gazetteers, to form the beginnings of a prose literature.

LITERACY AND LITERATURE

No one knows when Chinese writing first reached the Japanese islands, but the arrival of the scholar Wani from the Korean kingdom of Paekche in the late fourth or early fifth century is a convenient event from which to date the beginning of literacy.[1] Wani, who arrived in the

The translations of the poems in this chapter are from the author's forthcoming book entitled *The Gem-Glistening Cup*, volume 1 of *A Waka Anthology*, to be published by Stanford University Press. They appear here by permission.

1 *Nihon shoki*, Sakamoto Tarō, Ienaga Saburō, Inoue Mitsusada, and Ōno Susumu, eds., *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter cited as NKBT) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1967), vol 67, pp. 371–2.

sixteenth year of Ōjin, was appointed tutor of the crown prince, supplementing or supplanting another man from Paekche, Achiki or Achikishi, who had accompanied a gift of a stallion and a mare from the king of Paekche in the preceding years. Achiki recommended Wani as a superior scholar, and the Japanese court promptly asked Paekche to send him. Wani is said to have arrived with eleven volumes of Chinese writings, including the *Analects* and the *Thousand-Character Classic*.[2] He stayed on and became the ancestor of a specialized occupational group (*be*) of scribes, the *fumi no obito*.[3] Dependence on the services of such a group suggests that literacy did not initially spread far at the Japanese court; that is, the employment of Chinese or Korean secretaries would have been an obvious answer to whatever needs for communication in writing with the continent were felt by early Japanese monarchs. Rather, it seems likely that literacy remained at an extremely marginal level during the fifth and sixth centuries, and mostly in the hands of immigrants and their descendants. The earliest writings thought to have been produced in Japan are inscriptions on artifacts such as swords and mirrors. The longest such inscription, a Chinese text of 115 characters inlaid in gold, was discovered in 1978 under the rust of an iron sword excavated ten years earlier from the Inari-yama tumulus in Saitama Prefecture. Its alleged "Koreanisms" again point to the use of writing being in the hands of continentals, especially those from the Korean peninsula. Majority opinion assigns this sword text to a cyclical date corresponding to 471.[4]

Probably the Japanese people's real impulse for acquiring literacy came in the sixth century, with the introduction of Buddhism and the almost contemporaneous reunification of China under the Sui dynasty. These events – the establishment of a unified politically and culturally magnetic center on the mainland, and the extension to Japanese shores of the missionary religion then prevailing there – brought Japan into a radically different orientation toward the continent. The groundwork had been laid since the fourth century by extensive immigration from Korea, the immigrants including resident Chinese or sinified scholars

2 The anachronism has been pointed out in its references to the sixth-century *Thousand Character Classic*. Kojima Noriyuki speculates that the account on which the *Nihon shoki* narrative was based was altered to include mention of this text, considered basic to elementary training in reading Chinese. See Kojima Noriyuki, *Jōdai Nihon bungaku to Chūgoku bungaku* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1971), vol. 1, p. 82.

3 *Obito*, basically meaning "chief," was one of the clan titles (*kabane*) of ancient Japan. This group of scribes was centered in Kawachi on the coast and was referred to as the "western scribes," as distinguished from the "eastern scribes" in inland Yamato.

4 See Murayama Shichiro and Roy Andrew Miller, "The Inariyama Tumulus Sword Inscription," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 5 (1979): 412.

such as Wani, as well as a broad spectrum of artisans and other specialists. These people contributed materially to the evolution of insular culture; indeed, they may have altered it substantially. But the impact of continental immigration during the fourth and fifth centuries had more to do with horses and armor than with books and writing. This influx was ultimately a result of migrations in northeast Asia following the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century, and it brought about in the Japanese islands new instrumentalities of rule, perhaps by the incursion of a new ruling group, the much-discussed horse riders from beyond the Yalu River.[5] However that may have been, by the late sixth century the rulers of the Yamato state faced a greatly altered situation on the continent. The centuries-old division of China was wiped away in 589 by the Sui, a dynasty replaced by the more enduring T'ang in 618. In the seventh century the Korean peninsula was unified for the first time by Silla, the rival kingdoms of Paekche and Koguryŏ falling in 663 and 668, respectively. Politically resurgent East Asia made the Japanese rulers keenly conscious of the vulnerability of their island kingdom. One reaction was to establish a defense headquarters at Dazai-fu in northern Kyushu to guard against incursions from the newly expansive Korean and Chinese states.[6] But a far more significant and far-reaching move was the opening of formal relations with the Sui in 607 and the T'ang in 630, and the accompanying importation of elements of high Chinese civilization. For the first time in history, but not for the last, Japan faced a foreign threat by consciously opening itself to change from abroad, to the very techniques and ideologies viewed as advantages of the foreign power.

Two of the foreign advantages that the Japanese perceived were literacy and the Buddhist religion. The latter was introduced from Paekche in 552 (or perhaps 538) and, after overcoming brief but violent opposition from native conservative forces, was accepted by the Japanese court in 587.[7] The Yamato state and each of the clans (*uji*)

5 Gari Ledyard summarizes the horse rider theory of Egami Namio and reargues the case for a fourth-century invasion of Japan, in his "Galloping Along with the Horseriders: Looking for the Founders of Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1 (1974): 217–54.

6 The area was regarded as crucial from the fourth century on, and various earlier defense establishments predated the foundation of Dazai fu at its present location in 663. The dispatch of conscript "guardians of the capes" (*sakimori*) is memorialized in a large number of *Man'yōshū* poems.

7 The *Nihon shoki* mentions the gift of a gilt-bronze statue of Śākyamuni, banners, and sutras from the king of Paekche to the Yamato court in the tenth month of the year corresponding to 552; see NKBT, 68.100–1. Current scholarship seems to favor 538 as the year in which Buddhism reached Japan. The issue is discussed in Ienaga Saburō, ed., *Nihon Bukkyōshi* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 47–8. In accordance with the hypothesis explicated by Ienaga, King Kimmei's reign should be adjusted to date from 531, and the gift of the Buddhist

over which it reigned were cult-centered entities that traced their descent from ancestral nature deities, whose protection was believed to be essential to their survival and well-being. Guarantor and protector of the state was thus a ready-made role for the new faith, and the Japanese energetically set about erecting temples with such purposes in mind, an activity that culminated in the dedication of the mighty Tōdai-ji with its gigantic gilt-bronze Vairocana in 752. With the advent of Buddhism, Japan was no longer a barbaric outland, but a part of the spiritual world of East Asia, a sharer of belief, liturgy, iconography, and language. An unbreakable link had been forged to the continent and at a level that was bound to exert a strong influence on the subsequent course of Japanese civilization. Language is particularly relevant to this discussion, for Chinese had become, and remained, the scriptural language of East Asian Buddhism. The need to read and understand the sutras and other scriptural writings was a constant urge toward the reformation of the Japanese elite into a literate class. Japan's ties with China were strengthened by devout pilgrims and students who went to learn at the holy places of the Middle Kingdom. India, the birthplace of the faith, was too remote, and so China became for Japanese Buddhists the object of their ardent and arduous quest for enlightenment.

Confucianism was probably an influence in Japan before Buddhism, however. Its introduction was gradual, not a conversion experience, as Buddhism was to a degree. Confucianism formed the framework by means of which one state in East Asia could understand and address another, providing the vocabulary of social and international hierarchy. As we noted earlier, the scholar Wani from Paekche brought the *Analects*, the basic Confucian text, in the sixteenth year of Ōjin, that is, around the beginning of the fifth century. Throughout the sixth century Japan received from Paekche, its closest source of continental civilization, the dispatch under a rotation system of a series of "doctors of the Five Classics," as well as other learned specialists in medicine, divination, and calendrical science.[8] Paekche, also the source of Japan's first contact with Buddhism, was a hard-pressed ally in the wars of the Korean peninsula, and so it was anxious to commend itself to the rulers of Yamato in its struggle with the expansive state of Silla.

icon and sutra from Paekche, to the year earth-senior/horse, corresponding to 538. If the year at issue was the seventh of Kimmei's reign, as specified by *Gangōji garan engi narabi ni ruki shizaichō*, however, the revised accession date would have to be 532.

8 Kojima points out that the Doctors of the Five Classics came to Japan from Paekche during the same period when Paekche was receiving similar visiting scholars from the kingdom of Liang in South China. See Kojima, *Jōdai Nihon bungaku to Chūgoku bungaku*, vol. 1, p. 85.

Ultimately, in the seventh century, Silla overcame its rivals, both Paekche in the west and Koguryŏ in the north, having driven the Japanese from their own Korean toehold in Mimana (Kaya) a century earlier in 562. But by the middle of the seventh century, Japan had already established direct relations with China and was fully embarked on its adventure in recasting itself as the newest of the sinified states of east Asia.

A rough division may be made in this period between the seventh and eighth centuries, a distinction implied in the title of this chapter. The foundation of a capital at Nara in 710 brought an experience of urban life hitherto unknown on such a scale in Japan. The eighth century marked the height of the early flourishing of Buddhist institutions and sinitic culture in general. Trends that had been gaining momentum for some centuries reached their first period of full fruition. Politically, the seventh century was more tentative, though not less creative culturally. During most of this century the court moved from one site to another within the Asuka area, a region of fields and hills several miles south of Nara. In the sense intended in this chapter, "Asuka–Nara" is roughly equivalent to "seventh–eighth century."

The earliest writing in Japan was undoubtedly in the Chinese language, with the fifth-century sword inscriptions as examples, ones that already show the use of Chinese script to spell out Japanese names. Increasing mastery of *kambun* (Chinese prose) and the recurrent necessity of representing Japanese words are the dual factors that led to the peculiar evolution of literary culture in Japan. The training in Chinese classics that began with Wani in the early fifth century must have been cumulative, though greatly accelerated owing to the political and cultural ramifications of seventh-century contacts with the Asian continent. When Prince Shōtoku (574–622) produced his so-called Seventeen Injunctions (preserved in the *Nihon shoki*) in 604, he composed the text in *kambun* as a matter of course and displayed familiarity with fifteen different Chinese literary, historical, and philosophical works.[9] As Japan's earliest scholar-statesman and the most important patron of Buddhism of his day, Shōtoku represents the new directions in which he wished to lead his country. Japan was to be a land of Buddhist faith and Chinese learning, one whose polity was to embody the centralized imperial authority then newly renascent on the continent. This

9 *Shih ching, Shu ching, Hsiao ching, Lun yü, Tso chuan, Li chi, Kuan tzu, Meng tzu, Mo tzu, Lao tzu, Chuang tzu, Han fei tzu, Shih chi, Han shu,* and *Wen hsüan,* according to Hayashi Mikiya, "Chūgoku shisō," in *Asuka jidai,* vol. 2 of *Zusetsu Nihon bunkashi taikei* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1965), p. 165.

learned reformer seems to face forward into a new era enlightened by temples, books, and virtuous rule. And yet Prince Shōtoku was also interested in the past. Indeed, it was inevitable that he would be, for among the Chinese writings he studied were histories such as the *Shih chi* (Records of the historian) and the *Han shu* (Dynastic history of the Han). In 620, according to the *Nihon shoki,* Shōtoku together with Shima no Ōomi (Soga no Umako) compiled the first Japanese history of which we have record.[10] This set of writings treated both the imperial line and the subsidiary governing and occupational groups. It is thought that this history was lost, partly in the fire that destroyed the Soga mansions in the coup d'état of 645 and partly as a result of the disturbances of the Jinshin war of 672. In the 680s Emperor Temmu (d. 686) ordered the work to begin again, instigating dual historiographical projects that finally bore fruit in the earliest extant Japanese histories, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon shoki* (720).

It seems strange that the oldest Japanese books are thus two histories that were completed almost simultaneously, both under official sponsorship. Both are intended to tell the entire history of the race, indeed of the cosmos as well as of the nation as such, beginning like the Old Testament at the beginning of things, the rising of form out of chaos. Both are accounts of mythology in their earlier ranges and gradually work forward toward veritable history. But only the *Nihon shoki* truly takes on the character of a sober Chinese chronicle before breaking off with the abdication of the Empress Jitō in 697. One can see that it is a compromise between the compilers' urge to provide Japan with a counterpart of a Chinese dynastic history, or of certain aspects of the *Shih chi,* and the felt need to tell their own story of the world, which was a story of their gods as well as of themselves. The *Kojiki* is something else again, also a compromise but of a different sort. Here the proportion of myth, legend, folktale, poetry, and anecdote to the whole is overwhelmingly great. Chinese influence is by no means lacking, but it is slight compared with that in the *Nihon shoki.* The *Kojiki* is also much shorter – only three volumes as compared with thirty – and ends with the death of Empress Suiko in 628. That is, the bare chronology ends at that point; the anecdotal account goes no further than the reign of King Kenzō, who died in 487.

From the historiographical point of view, the *Kojiki* is a fairly primitive account of ancient history and myth, whereas the *Nihon shoki* is intended to be a history of modern as well as ancient times, the prod-

10 Suiko 28 (620) 8, NKBT, 68.203.

uct of thorough and up-to-date research. Except for the poems with which its text is enlivened, the *Nihon shoki* is written in literary Chinese, by far the longest document to be composed in Japan in that (or any other) language up until the time of its appearance. The *Kojiki* is different here again, being even in its prose text an unstable amalgam of Chinese and Japanese syntax, all represented in Chinese characters, to be sure, but with a unique hybrid quality. Clauses in literary Chinese and others in phonetically represented Japanese appear in the same sentence. This is the essence of its compromise: a linguistic one.

The *Kojiki* was an experiment, an odd and fascinating one never repeated in quite the same way, though its tension between the Chinese and Japanese languages remained a formative dynamic in the evolution of writing styles in Japan. It has been suggested that the motivation for its compilation was essentially an internal matter – an attempt to straighten out for the Japanese themselves the tangled and conflicting claims to divine or other prestigious ancestry of the various noble clans – whereas the *Nihon shoki* was intended to be an "official" history to show to foreigners (hence written in respectable Chinese) and to point to with pride.[11]

Writing and learning in the form of the Chinese classics had thus been introduced to Japan by the beginning of the fifth century. Sword inscriptions in Chinese showing alleged Korean usages have been unearthed from the same century. In the sixth century the Japanese court set up a system of visiting professors in various aspects of Chinese learning, supplied by the Korean state of Paekche. At the same time, Paekche introduced its insular neighbor to Buddhism, and Buddhism in turn brought in more writings to be studied in the form of its sacred scriptures. Official interest in historiography, the compilation of codes, and the like shows up in the seventh century, especially on the parts of Prince Shōtoku and Emperor Temmu. It was probably also at this time that the transition from oral to written poetry began, but this was a process that was never completed, in the sense that the oral composition of poetry never ceased, even at the highest cultural level. But it was no doubt in the seventh century that poems, both new and old, began to be written down as a normal thing. This matter of writing down poetry had important implications for the evolution of literary culture in Japan and must concern us here. But first let us note that the composition of Chinese poetry (*kanshi*) in Japan, a sure signal

11 Donald L. Philippi, trans., "Introduction," *Kojiki* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), pp. 16–17.

of advancing sophistication, also started in the late seventh century. The compilation of poetic anthologies, another activity that the Japanese learned from the Chinese, followed in the eighth century, resulting in two works that have come down to us, the *Kaifūsō* (751), the first anthology of *kanshi* by Japanese authors, and the *Man'yōshū* (after 759), the earliest extant anthology of Japanese verse. The historiographical activities commencing in the seventh century had meanwhile resulted in the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon shoki* (720).

The Japanese were not among the handful of peoples that invented a writing system, so to speak, from scratch. Like most civilizations, they adapted a neighboring one. It was an accident of geography and history that the only one they encountered during the early centuries of their relations with the outside world should have been that of the Chinese. The results of this accident were as far-reaching and formative of their nascent culture as would have been the case if they had encountered Egyptian hieroglyphics and nothing else. They were inevitably drawn into the orbit of a self-contained and powerful civilization with a unique script that has always acted as an effective barrier between those who know and use it and those who do not. Like writing generally, the Chinese writing system had pictographic origins, but resisting the general trend, it neither became the relic of a dead civilization nor evolved completely into a phonetic system. It is in fact the only nonphonetic writing system remaining in use in the world today. From pictographic origins the so-called Chinese characters came to include a large repertory of "ideographs," signs denoting the abstract concepts of an advanced civilization. They also developed classes of structurally complex graphs, in which homophones are distinguished by a "radical system" of significs combined into one sign with a common phonetic element. The signific–phonetic structure of many characters shows that the system contains the seed of a purely phonetic way of writing, as the pronunciation of such characters is predictable to the experienced reader. As it turned out, it was the Japanese who realized this potential.

The most important peculiarity of the way in which writing evolved in China that made adaptation of the resulting system take the form it did in Japan was that each graph represented a word in the Chinese language. Chinese was made up of monosyllabic words, with a number of "tones" or voice contours helping distinguish the resultant large number of homophones. One graph thus represented one syllable, the pronunciation of which was more or less fixed within a given dialect. It was therefore possible to use the graphs in a way not intended by their

inventors, that is, phonetically, using the pronunciation and disregarding the meaning (and the tone) in order to write words in another language. This process involved making a series of rough sound equivalences, as the phonetic quality of no two languages is identical. But it was a process that could and did work. It was, in fact, a process that the Chinese themselves had invented so as to transcribe the foreign words coming in with Buddhist scriptures from India by way of Central Asia from the third century onward. Some Sanskrit words the Chinese chose to translate, in the process expanding, refining, or otherwise altering the denotations of lexical items in their own language. In other cases they adopted the Sanskrit word or name as part of their Buddhist vocabulary and spelled it out, syllable by syllable, with characters used for their phonetic value. It was this system, already in use in the Buddhist writings they obtained from China, that the Japanese employed to transcribe words in their own language, which like Sanskrit was highly polysyllabic. And so a text like the *Nihon shoki* could be written in Chinese, with the names of Japanese people and places represented with characters used phonetically. To the Japanese this system would have posed little problem (once they had acquired the necessary skill in Chinese), as they could readily distinguish words in their own language when reading the resulting text, easily making their way back and forth between the basically semantic expository continuum and the individual phonetic items, though the whole would have been an undifferentiated series of Chinese characters to the untrained eye.

If the Japanese had been content to go on in this way, they could have remained literate in Chinese and never bothered to write their own language at all. The most obvious alternative was to write out not only individual Japanese words but also whole Japanese texts, in the character-by-character phonetic method. As the compiler of the *Kojiki* observed in his preface, the result would have reached inordinate lengths. He thus devised the compromise just described, in which the text oscillates between the two languages.[12] But this solution was inherently unsatisfactory, as the work produced was really neither Japanese nor Chinese. The phonetic method was, however, a reasonable answer to the other problem that was immediately presented to would-be Japanese historians, anthologists, and poets: how to record Japanese poetry. The numerous poems preserved in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*

12 The compiler, Ō no Yasumaro (d. 723), remarks in his Preface to the *Kojiki*, "To narrate everything in *kun* [i.e., semantically] would miss the sense, whereas to write it all down in *on* [i.e., phonetically] would drag out the content to even greater length. And so I have mixed *on* and *kun* in the same sentence." See *Kojiki*, NKBT, 1.48–9.

are spelled out character by character, each graph used for its phonetic value, without an admixture of semantic usages. These ancient songs are thus preserved in exact phonetic notation, and it is plain that the compilers of the chronicles understood that a poem exists in its sound value and so must be represented unambiguously in its own language, whereas prose is a matter of conveying ideas and thus can be written with a greater degree of phonetic and syntactic ambiguity or even in a completely different language. Or so one would think. But the matter turns out to be much more complex than this, and the neat distinction proposed between the proper ways of writing prose and poetry was by no means uniformly observed in the largest collection of early Japanese verse, the *Man'yōshū* of the eighth century. Many of the over 4,500 poems in this anthology are in fact recorded in the way just described, and it is no doubt for this reason that the phonetic use of Chinese characters is referred to as *man'yōgana* (Man'yō borrowed names), with *kana* (borrowed names) being the Japanese term for the character-derived phonetic writing systems that were eventually developed. But many other poems in the *Man'yōshū* are not written in *man'yōgana*, at least not in their entirety. The text of the *Man'yōshū* in fact presents fascinating evidence of scribal preference for variety and complexity and even for deliberate obscurity over a simple and easily learned regularity. Complexity entered the system in a number of different ways. One of these was that the obvious solution of deciding on one character for each syllable of the Japanese phonetic system was deliberately avoided. Several characters with the same pronunciation were used for the same syllable. The syllable *shi,* for instance, was written with at least twenty-nine different graphs used for their Sino-Japanese (*on*) value. Another feature of the Man'yō writing system was the employment of whole phrases or clauses of Chinese syntax, in which the succession of characters would be perfectly readable as Chinese but in which a Japanese equivalent or "translation" was implied. To take a simple instance, the three graphs *ta wang chih* (in their modern Mandarin pronunciation) give the meaning "of the great king." The phrase is "read" by a quickly established convention as *ōkimi no,* meaning roughly the same thing in Japanese. These Japanese "readings" of characters are known as *kun*. A combination of *on* and *kun* readings of characters eventually came to typify Japanese prose orthography. It characterizes *Man'yōshū* orthography as well, but with an important difference. In the *Man'yōshū* (and the poetry in the early chronicles) all the *on* readings are "phonograms," that is, characters used for their phonetic value in the way just described, whereas in modern Japanese

prose they are mostly Chinese loanwords, of which the language eventually adopted an enormous lexicon. Japanese poetry, however, remained free of loanwords from its beginning, except for a few Buddhist items in certain restricted types of poetry, and a range of extremely early importations not recognized as loans.[13]

A further refinement or complication of Man'yō orthography is the "borrowed *kun*." Not only were the Sino-Japanese pronunciations of the characters used for phonetic spelling, but once a *kun* reading had been established for a character, it too could be borrowed and used for phonetic purposes. For instance, the character *chen*, "shake," was "read" in Japanese as *furu*, a verb with the same meaning. The character could then be borrowed to write the place name Furu. Similarly, the two numeral characters for "five" and "ten" written in combination made not only *wu-shih*, the Chinese word for "fifty," but the Old Japanese word for the same number, namely, *i*. According to the principle of "borrowed *kun*," "fifty" could and did also represent the word *i*, "sleep," as well as the first syllable in the place name Irago. There are innumerable examples of this sort of thing in the *Man'yōshū*. *Kun*- and *on*-based *man'yōgana* were sometimes used in the spelling of the same word, and a single line of poetry might have semantic and phonetic components as well as "zero" elements, in which the grammar calls for a possessive particle (for instance), which is not represented orthographically but is simply supplied by the reader. There also are examples of Chinese word order, which are meant to be reversed and read as Japanese syntax. As if all this were not enough, there is the phenomenon of associative transference, in which, for example, the characters "flying bird" represent the place name Asuka, because Asuka had *tobu tori no* ("of the flying bird") as a fixed epithet. The ultimate in orthographic word games is provided by such a rebus as "on top of the mountain there is another mountain," represented by five characters that form the verb *ide*, "come out." The point of this visual pun is that the character for "come out" resembles two superimposed "mountain" characters. Graphomania of this order was not only a Japanese malady. In fact, the "two mountains" rebus derives directly from a much more complicated series of conundrums in a Chinese poem included in *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung*, a sixth-century anthology well known in Japan.[14]

13 Among these latter are probably the words for "horse" (*uma*, from Chinese *ma*) and "plum" (*ume*, from Chinese *mei*).

14 For the Japanese use of the rebus, see MYS 9:1787. The Chinese source is the first of "Four Old *Chüeh-chu* Poems" from chap. 10 of *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung*, a sixth-century Chinese anthology of love poetry. For a translation, see Anne Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 264.

These special qualities of *Man'yōshū* orthography represent one of the cultural features of the age, an intoxication with the wonders of the new learning and an exploration of its various possibilities. A more sober approach to the mechanics of writing eventually led to an almost exclusive preference for the phonetic element of the methodological tangle that teased the brains of eight-century scribes. Regularization of phonogram spelling had culminated in *kana* syllabaries by the beginning of the tenth century. There resulted two of these syllabaries, *hiragana* (smooth *kana*) and *katakana* (square *kana*). The former developed from cursive abbreviations of whole characters, and the latter, from isolated graphic elements. *Hiragana* became the major vehicle for the new courtly literature of the tenth century and after, whereas *katakana* was more or less limited to providing glosses on Chinese texts. All of this later development is outside the scope of this chapter, but it is of interest to note that the tolerance for superfluous scriptal complexity so notable in the *Man'yōshū* never entirely disappeared. The *hiragana* system remained highly redundant until its simplification in modern times, using a variety of symbols for the same syllable. And even now, the Japanese writing system is probably the world's most complex, its mix of Chinese characters in various readings and the two *kana* systems making possible a playing back and forth between semantic and phonetic that is unusual if not unique. In discovering literacy, the Japanese created an enduring strand of their cultural fabric.

The oldest Japanese book to come down to us is the *Kojiki* (Record of ancient matters), compiled as a result of the historiographical initiatives already mentioned and presented to Empress Gemmei in 712. Its compiler was Ō no Yasumaro (d. 723), a scholar-official at Gemmei's court. In 711 Yasumaro was ordered to "record and present" a set of documents previously "learned" by Hieda no Are. Little is known of Hieda no Are, who was an attendant (*toneri*) of Emperor Temmu renowned for his apparently photographic memory. The documents were of two sorts, genealogical and anecdotal. The genealogical group, *Sumera mikoto no hitsugi* (Sun lineage of the sovereigns), traced the ancestry of the ruling house from its mythical origins to the reign of Empress Suiko, a sovereign who died in 628. The anecdotal documents, the *Saki no yo no furugoto* (Ancient accounts of former ages), leave off around 498, with the reign of King Kenzō. How to understand the respective functions of Are and Yasumaro in the compilation of the *Kojiki* is by no means clear, but it has been suggested that Are

had preserved in his memory the relevant documents with their correct "readings" and that Yasumaro recorded these readings in the somewhat abbreviated amalgam of Chinese and Japanese that he defended as a compromise between the demands of clarity and concision.[15]

The *Kojiki* is made up of three books, or scrolls. The first book presents an officially approved version of the basic myths of the Japanese as they had been transmitted down to the seventh century. After an account of origins in which generations of deities come into existence spontaneously, there appear the creator gods Izanagi and Izanami. These are a male and female pair, and the myth describes how they marry and create the islands of Japan by means of sexual generation. A possibly significant detail is that the woman speaks first in the marriage ceremony, leading to the production of defective offspring and the necessity of repeating the rites in an order that gives the initiative to the male. A shift from matriarchal to patriarchal institutions may have found expression in this story. When Izanami gives birth to the fire deity, she is burned and dies. Izanagi mourns for her, "crawling around her head and around her feet" in a paroxysm of grief that seems to look forward to the laments of Hitomaro in the *Man'yōshū*. Izanagi searches for Izanami in the land of the dead, the dark realm of Yomi no Kuni; searching for the dead is also part of the ritual of grief described by Hitomaro. Izanami has already "eaten of the hearth of Yomi" and so cannot return to the land of the living. Against her wishes, Izanagi strikes fire to look at her, only to discover maggots swarming in a mass of putrefaction. This horrific scene is followed by a nightmarelike sequence in which the dead Izanami and the "hags of Yomi" chase Izanagi, who escapes and blocks with a boulder the entrance to Yomi. The primordial pair stand on opposite sides of the boulder and curse each other, thereby breaking their troth.

This climax to the second and most dramatic phase of the creation myth leads into a bridge passage in which Izanagi, cleansing himself in a river from the foulness of Yomi, gives birth to various deities from different parts of his body. The most important of these deities are Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess), born from his left eye, and from his nose a kami variously associated with the sea, the wind, the earth, and the underworld. This kami, Susa no O, becomes the enemy of his sister Amaterasu in the next sequence of *Kojiki* myth. Quarrelsome, he confronts Amaterasu in her realm of heaven, where he defeats her in a

15 Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 7–8.

contest of progenitive power and "rages in victory." The several offenses committed by Susa no O in heaven include mischief directed against the settled patterns of an agricultural society (breaking down the ridges between the rice paddies) and other deeds of a possible magical significance (flaying the heavenly piebald colt with a backward flaying). They so alarm and offend Amaterasu that she hides in a cave, thus depriving the world of light. Once she has been lured out again by a mirror and a sexually arousing dance, Susa no O is punished by expulsion from heaven. That the mythology is dealing with two distinct cults is made evident by what happens next. Once Susa no O returns to earth, he changes from a disruptive force to a culture hero. By killing the food goddess he makes possible the sprouting of food grains from her corpse. Next he rescues a maiden by slaying a dragon and builds a palace for himself and his bride. His descendant Ōkuni Nushi (great country master) becomes in due course the deity of the major cultic center of Izumo on the Japan Sea, as Amaterasu was at Ise, facing out toward the Pacific. The collision of two cults and two peoples thus seems to lie under the surface of the mythic narrative. It is apparent that a compromise was worked out, for when Amaterasu sends down her own grandson to take possession of earth, the land has to be ceded by Ōkuni Nushi and his progeny. In return for giving up earthly domain, Ōkuni Nushi is guaranteed eternal worship at the Grand Shrine of Izumo, second in prestige only to that of the Sun Goddess herself at Ise. The way is then cleared for the sun lineage to extend its rule over Japan, and accounts of the reigns of the successive sovereigns occupy the second and third books of the *Kojiki*.

The *Kojiki* is thus a book of grand theme and majestic sweep. But it is also very close to the primitive earthiness of the animistic mythology on which its earlier strata are based. Anecdote and description are of a specific physicality that contributes strongly to the quality of the book as literature. The value of the *Kojiki* is in fact literary more than historiographical. Not only are the major myths recounted in a highly dramatic and vivid fashion, but the narrative also is laced through with folktales and poems. The 112 ancient songs of the *Kojiki* are a precious corpus of early oral verse, often giving evidence of an existence independent of the narrative in which they are embedded. Formally, they divide into prototypes of the *tanka* (short poem) and *chōka* (long poem), the two principal varieties of early Japanese verse. Many are without the precise five–seven syllabic structure realized probably during the seventh century, thus bespeaking a putative antiquity. The

very first poem in the book, however, is in form a perfect thirty-one-syllable *tanka*, a fact that suggests a breadth of time in the poetic component, or perhaps the later revision of early materials. The matter of the songs is often amorous, sometimes expressed in imagery of latent sexual content, occasionally martial, and characteristically traditional or "folk" in type. The traditional reciters of the long songs, which may have been danced or enacted in some manner, are occasionally named in the text, though the usual convention is that the person in the story makes up the poem on the spur of the moment. Structurally, many of the songs show the typical expository order of early Japanese verse, in which preposited phrases of a metaphorical or analogical nature lead, often by means of word play, into the main statement of the poem.

Song and story thus constitute much of the appeal of this earliest Japanese book. Even the accounts of the sovereigns concentrate as much or more on their backstage lives – their amorous entanglements or minor incidents of their reigns – as on matters of state. The many amours of the emperors Nintoku and Yūryaku are cases in point. The high incidence of poetry in these passages makes them into poem-tales foreshadowing a major genre of semifiction that developed in the tenth century. And yet the *Kojiki* is not purely anecdotal; it is a heady brew of history, myth, folktale, and poetry, in which the historical narrative asserts itself as the main organizational thrust, dragging along a great accumulation of traditions, all of which are treated with equal credence. It is as if George Washington's chopping down his father's cherry tree received equal billing with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, or King Arthur and the Round Table were treated as historical in the same sense as King John and *Magna Carta*. A story such as that of Yamato Takeru no Mikoto, "the brave of Yamato," contains the elements of heroic saga and points to the value of the *Kojiki* for an understanding of the formative ideals of the race. Yamato Takeru is wily, bloody, and bold but also loyal and naive. His wiliness is toward his enemies, his naïveté toward received authority. In the process of conquering his father's enemies, he incurs a curse for going too far – overstepping the boundary of human limitations and offending a kami. Sickening to death as a result of this act of hubris, Yamato Takeru becomes melancholy and sings of his longing for home. He dies, and his spirit turns into a great white bird and flies away. A particularly Japanese sense of tragedy emerges from this hero-tale, a tragedy of a failed hero and a major theme in later legend, literature,

and historical event. The feeling conveyed is one of pathos, an awareness of the fragility of glory.[16]

The *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan) is written in Chinese, its compilers having apparently disdained the linguistic compromise worked out for the *Kojiki*. It too is an outgrowth of the historiographical work ordered by Emperor Temmu in 681. In thirty books, it covers Japanese history from its beginning to the abdication of Empress Jitō in 697. It was completed and presented to Empress Genshō in 720 by Prince Toneri (677–735), a son of Emperor Temmu. Others involved in the project at its inception in the 680s included imperial princes Kawashima (657–691) and Osakabe (d. 705), heading up a staff of ten. The result of their labors was adopted as the official history, the first of a series that ultimately extended to six (the *Rikkokushi* or Six national histories), inspired by and partially modeled on the Chinese dynastic histories. It seems probable that the *Kojiki* was relegated to a subsidiary status and was soon the victim of neglect.

In a sense, the *Nihon shoki* is everything the *Kojiki* is and more. The same mythology is recounted in the early books, and other versions of many of the same songs and stories can be found. The mythological portion of the narrative is in fact longer and more elaborate than that of the *Kojiki*, because the compilers quote a number of often conflicting accounts for each of the major myths, indicating that the sources available were much more numerous than might be supposed from a reading of the earlier work. In one version, for instance, Izanagi and Izanami create the Sun Goddess by means of sexual reproduction, rather than her being born from the ablutions of the estranged male parent. It is interesting to note that the heroic and amorous exploits of the deity Ōkuni Nushi are missing from the *Nihon shoki*, evidence perhaps of a further downgrading of the Izumo cult. In addition to its plethora of material on most of the other myths, the *Nihon shoki* presents a chronicle of historical events that simply dwarfs what is to be found in the *Kojiki*. As it approaches the time of the chroniclers, the narrative becomes increasingly prosaic, detailed, focused on public rather than private matters, and, presumably, reliable. In other words, the *Nihon shoki* is somewhat more valuable as history than as literature, whereas the reverse is true of the *Kojiki*. Nevertheless, the *Nihon shoki* is by no means to be accepted uncritically as a historical source,

16 Takagi Ichinosuke treated the Yamato Takeru story in "Yamato Takeru no Mikoto to rōman seishin," one of the essays in his book *Yoshino no ayu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1943). The theme was also explored by Ivan Morris in *The Nobility of Failure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), pp. 1–13.

even in its nonmythological sections. The parts dealing with relations between Japan and Korea in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries are a good case in point. Especially in the earlier ranges of this period, the account is almost impossible to follow, much less to credit, in its description of Japanese campaigns on the peninsula and the relations among Yamato, Paekche, and Silla. The tendentious nature of Japanese claims on their Korean neighbors, accepted totally by the authors, is obvious, but how to untangle the resulting web of distortion and self-glorification is by no means clear.[17] These limitations on the value of the *Nihon shoki* as history by no means differentiate it from the *Kojiki*. The latter is simply less copious and more naive in its tendentiousness. In this very naïveté in fact resides much of the appeal of the earlier and shorter book: The *Kojiki* has not been as thoroughly sinicized as has the *Nihon shoki*. This fact is obvious from the linguistic medium employed by each, but the difference strongly colors even the characterization of certain semihistorical figures. For instance, the story of Yamato Takeru in the *Kojiki* concentrates on the guile, violence, loyalty, and hubris of the hero – he emerges strongly as a simple and tragic figure, sketched in with a few strokes in a spare and telling narrative. In the *Nihon shoki*, however, the same character spouts reams of high Confucian sentiment, and his death with songs on his lips is replaced by a long speech in which he takes his parting in phrases conned from Chinese sources. The effect is noble but remote from the unpretentious lyricism of the Japanese.

Another set of writings from the eighth century are the *fudoki*, or local gazetteers. In 713 Empress Gemmei ordered each province to compile a record of its topography, products, and local lore. Only the *Izumo fudoki* survives intact; the gazetteers of Harima, Bungo, Hitachi, and Hizen are partially preserved, and fragments of a number of others have come down thanks to being quoted in various works. The language of the *fudoki* is basically Chinese, with the exception of certain passages that give verbatim accounts of local tradition, in which phonetic representations of Japanese grammatical elements intrude on the Chinese syntax. The poems are represented phonetically as in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, and the same is of course true of Japanese names. The initiative for compiling the *fudoki* was part of the same general effort to conform to Chinese practices that led to the histories and poetic anthologies. Descriptions of the topographical,

17 For a discussion and analysis of historical accounts of insular–peninsular relations at this period, see Ledyard, "Galloping Away with the Horseriders," pp. 238–42.

botanical, zoological, and legendary features of local areas date back at least to the *Shan-hai ching* (Classic of mountains and seas) in China, and local gazetteers flourished particularly in the Six Dynasties, the period in China so influential on the early Japanese.[18] Local information of a similar nature was also incorporated in dynastic histories. It seems that the Japanese *fudoki* were the victims of official neglect, however, in view of the fragmentary state of their preservation. The portions that remain are of semiliterary interest, for along with the statistics of distances and numbers of shrines and villages are included a scattering of local legends and myths. The myths of Izumo, for instance, show yet other versions of the material edited in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. It is apparent that the compilers of the national histories picked and chose from abundant local material. In this respect, study of the remaining *fudoki* is important to understanding early Japan, and it is unfortunate that the entire set of these documents no longer exists.

Another feature of the *fudoki* is the prominence given to explanations of the origins of place names. This seems to have been among the principal preoccupations of the compilers. Some explanations are straightforward and plausible, for example, a place is called Kuroda (black field) because its soil is black. Others contain references to mythology, as in the case of a community named Tatenuhi (shield sewing), alleged to refer to the place where "[the god] Futsunushi stitched up a rip in his sturdy shield of heaven."[19] This interest in etymology was no accident: The edict ordering the compilation of the *fudoki* directed the compilers to record the "origins of the names of mountains, rivers, plains and fields," as well as to give "good characters" to the names of the administrative units.[20] An interest in origins as well as in the auspicious and "correct" is everywhere present in ancient Japanese writings, evidence of parallel antiquarian and "civilizing" tendencies. The *fudoki* also contain anecdotes that belong to *setsuwa* literature, the genre of tales, often of a supernatural character, that began with the chronicles but flourished most notably in the great collections of the twelfth century and later. Such a story is that of the shark that kills a young girl and then is escorted to her bereaved father

18 The *Shan-hai-ching* is attributed to Po I, assistant of the legendary ruler Yü who tamed the floodwaters in Chinese antiquity. The core of the work is probably late Chou with later additions. Like the Japanese *fudoki*, it combines geographical information with fantastic stories.

19 Michiko Yamaguchi Aoki, trans., *Izumo fudoki* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1971), p. 84.

20 Kuroita Katsumi, ed., *Shoku Nihongi*, *Shintei zōho kokushi taikei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1935), vol. 2, p. 52.

for punishment by a hundred other sharks in answer to the father's prayers to the gods.

The compilation of history, local tradition, and topographical data was a literate activity that the Japanese learned from Chinese example. So also were the composition and compilation of poems. We have already noted the poetic content of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, where men and women, emperors and gods often speak in verse. The verse is native, linguistically the most stubbornly native matrix with which the compilers had to work. But by the late seventh century, Chinese-style education among Japanese aristrocrats and Buddhist clergy had led to participation in another Chinese cultural activity, the composition of *kanshi*, or Chinese poetry. Poetry to the Chinese was both a high art and something of a social necessity. In both respects it had much to teach the Japanese, and it is hardly fortuitous that Japanese poetry, too, came to be characterized by a similar dual nature. The loftier reaches of Chinese poetic accomplishment were from the beginning something toward which the Japanese might strive but which in the nature of things they were unlikely to attain. And why indeed as newly literate foreigners should they have attempted to master a highly complex thousand-year-old art when they had, as the early chronicles testify, a living poetic tradition of their own? The answer must be twofold: The evidence is overwhelming that the Japanese found certain aspects of Chinese civilization extremely attractive and that among these were those that impressed by visual splendor or dazzling verbal intricacy. Buddhist sculpture, painting, and architecture, and the artifice of Six Dynasties poetry attracted Japanese attention and emulation and began, in the Asuka–Nara period, traditions of mastery that lasted almost into our own time. Technical difficulties have always been a challenge, not a deterrent, to the Japanese. The other part of the answer is that once they had entered the Chinese cultural sphere, the Japanese came to participate in the social necessity referred to earlier. The Japanese began sending embassies to China in 600. Diplomatic and cultural exchange among East Asian countries involved certain niceties, among which was the composition of suitably felicitous or regretful poems at state banquets and farewell dinners. In order to hold up their heads before their hosts, the Japanese at some point had to learn how to create Chinese verses. They themselves served as hosts to Korean embassies, where the same niceties had to be observed. Chinese was the language of diplomacy as well as of learning and religion. Furthermore, as the Japanese increasingly reformed their state along the Chinese model in the seventh and eighth centuries, they wished to

appear civilized even among themselves, with no foreigners looking on. "No foreigners" is a delicate point, however, inasmuch as Japanese society at this time contained a large element of recent continental immigrants, largely from the Korean states. These so-called *kikajin* were influential, indeed indispensable, to fostering arts, crafts, and learning in Asuka–Nara Japan. *Kikajin* families became fully Japanese in due course, and their skills spread throughout Japanese society.

Needless to say, it is not known when the first Chinese poem was written in Japan. But it seems certain that the activity had taken hold by the reign of Emperor Tenji (661–71), as there are references to both the emperor and his courtiers taking part in literary banquets. "No mere hundred were their compositions" according to the preface of the *Kaifūsō*. An elegant Chinese-style literary atmosphere at the Ōmi court is also evidenced in the *Man'yōshū* in a famous *chōka* debating the relative merits of spring and fall.[21] It seems that by the 670s, thanks to the Chinese influence, literature was a recognized avocation existing apart from myth, ritual, and history. But almost none of the Chinese poetic works of the Ōmi court have survived; presumably they were destroyed in the Jinshin war of 672 in which the capital at Ōmi was burned and power violently transferred from Tenji's son Prince Ōtomo to his brother Prince Ōama (Emperor Temmu). There are, to be sure, two surviving poems written by the unfortunate Prince Ōtomo (648–72) himself. These two *chüeh-chü*, or four-line stanzas, are thus the oldest Chinese verses written by a Japanese to come down to us. One is a felicitous banquet poem on the brilliance of his father's reign, and the other is a meditation on his own unfitness to rule. This latter has a pathetic irony, as Ōtomo died in the fall of the Ōmi capital in 672 after no more than a few months on the throne. Another early poet in the Chinese mode is Prince Ōtsu (663–86), who likewise came to a bad end, becoming involved in an abortive coup d'état and being condemned to obligatory suicide in 686. He left touching farewell poems in both Chinese and Japanese.[22]

The principal corpus of Chinese verse (*kanshi*) composed in Japan during the Asuka–Nara period is to be found in the *Kaifūsō* (Fond recollections of poetry), a collection of 120 poems compiled in 751 by an unknown anthologist. Sixty-four named poets are represented.

21 The poem is MYS I:16, by Princess Nukata, who lived from the 630s to the 690s. Her poem apparently was composed on a formal literary occasion at court in the 660s.

22 See MYS 3:416, *Kaifūsō* 7. Kojima suggests that Prince Ōtsu's Chinese farewell poem is likely to have been modeled closely on a Six Dynasties antecedent. See Kojima, *Jōdai Nihon bungaku to Chūgoku bungaku*, vol. 3 (1971), p. 1262.

There are nobles, monks, and a number of princes, including Ōtomo and Ōtsu, and Emperor Mommu (683–707) as well. All the poems are in the Chinese poetic *shih* form, with rhymes at the ends of the even-numbered lines. One rhyme runs through an entire poem. The line length is determined for each poem as either five or seven syllables (unlike *waka,* in which the fives and sevens alternate). Four and eight lines are the most common poem lengths. The poems in the *Kaifūsō* are of the "old *shih*" type; that is, they do not observe the strict rules of tonal parallelism and antithesis that were mandatory in the "regulated *shih*" that flourished in China starting with the T'ang period. The verses in the *Kaifūsō,* and all the Japanese *kanshi* of its time, are oriented not toward the contemporary masterworks of T'ang but toward the earlier Six Dynasties, specifically the decadent late Six Dynasties poetry of the sixth century. In this poetry, artifice often became artificiality, and a determined divorcement had been effected from any sort of straightforward statement and from anything but the most refined attitudes and aristocratic content. This kind of poetry, learned from anthologies such as the *Wen-hsüan* and *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung,* remained highly admired in Japan long after it passed out of favor in China, with results that were far-reaching in the formation of Japanese taste and that ultimately found their way into *waka* and a new prose literature. Banquet poems, predictably of little depth, make up a large proportion of the content of the *Kaifūsō.* The verse is in any case preponderantly imitative and perhaps does not deserve a high place in the history of Japanese literature, of which it nevertheless – despite its linguistic distinctiveness – forms a part. Culturally, however, it represents an important pole of Japanese orientation, not only in the Asuka–Nara period but later as well. Partially through efforts like those seen in the *Kaifūsō,* the Japanese ultimately became not imitators of China but participants in China-centered East Asian civilization. The content of the *Kaifūsō* represents some of their proudest early school exercises. And in any case it would be unfair to dismiss all these verses as devoid of literary merit. In some at least, the voice of the poet comes through the alien conventions to good effect.

A certain number of *kanshi* (Chinese poems), as well as *kambun* (Chinese prose) passages, are also preserved in the *Man'yōshū.* The *Man'yōshū* is unquestionably the great literary monument of the Asuka–Nara period, the culmination and repository of all that Japanese poetic culture had become up until that time. It is the earliest extant *waka* anthology, and its enormous bulk includes over 4,500 poems, dating from the year 759 backward for an indeterminate span,

but surely well over a century. The earliest attributions are a set of four *tanka* ascribed to Iwanohime, a consort of the fourth- or fifth-century monarch Nintoku. A healthy skepticism is recommended in regard to all such extremely early attributions. Even the infinitely more "primitive" songs associated with Iwanohime in the *Kojiki* are thought to have been placed in her mouth by the compilers. The four *Man'yōshū tanka* are perfectly realized and quite lovely examples of a *waka* style that one might guess was not achieved earlier than the seventh century. Most of the content of the *Man'yōshū* dates from after the Jinshin war of 672, an event that seems echoed in the strains of some of the more majestic *chōka* or long poems that are an outstanding feature of the collection.

There are various ways of periodizing the *Man'yōshū*. One meaningful division of the content would be into a scattering of poems, some perhaps very old, before Jinshin; the poetry of the period from 672 to the foundation of the Nara in 710, dominated politically by the victors in the Jinshin war and their heirs and poetically by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro; and the Nara period up to the terminal date in the *Man'yōshū* of 759, a period when urban sophistication began to produce a new and in some ways radically different attitude toward literary creativity. It is in this last period in which the Chinese content of the *Man'yōshū* comes to the fore and when the compilation of the anthology probably began. Both the Chinese content and the compilation are associated with the Ōtomo clan and its literary adherents. Book 5 of the *Man'yōshū*, made up of compositions of the circle of Ōtomo no Tabito (665–731) and his crony Yamanoue no Okura (660–ca. 733), bulks large in this regard. Both Tabito and Okura (himself an anthologist) were practitioners of the new skills in Chinese literary prose and poetry, as well as of *waka*, and Tabito is represented by a *shih* in the *Kaifūsō*. Tabito's son Yakamochi (718–85) was the probable main compiler of the *Man'yōshū*, and along with being the most extensively preserved (over four hundred poems) *waka* poet in the collection, he recorded several interesting exchanges in Chinese with his cousin Ōtomo no Ikenushi. These, from a period in the 740s when Yakamochi was governor of Etchū Province, show him and Ikenushi in the roles of Chinese-style literary gentlemen, complimenting each other on their verses and celebrating the joys of male companionship. Both the verse and the prose are highly flowery, representing in this regard standards of taste appropriate to their Six Dynasties inspiration. But the theme of friendship is one more broadly based in the ethos of Chinese poetry, and it is apparent that it provided these early

Japanese poets with an option not available in the tradition of their own poetry. *Waka* remained oriented toward romantic love between the sexes; friendship between men for some reason continued to be embedded in the poetic conventions of the Chinese verse that had developed it as a primary concern. In this respect a Nara poet like Yakamochi was operating in dual personae, able to switch at will from his Japanese to his Chinese self. It was during the Nara period that this characteristic of Japanese high culture reached its early maturity.

The *Man'yōshū* is thus an anthology of poetry in the two languages, a fact usually overlooked because the Japanese content looms much larger. In the traditional way of editing the *Man'yōshū*, the Chinese poems were not even given numbers, as if they were mere appendages to the *waka*, and the several long Chinese prose passages were not numbered either. This approach unfortunately obscures what the *Man'yōshū* really is – a collection of *waka*, *kanshi*, and *kambun*, of literary efforts in both languages in use at the time of its compilation. It is a true product of the developing hybrid culture out of which it came.

Nevertheless, the *Man'yōshū*'s primary significance is as the great compendium of early Japanese poetry. Because the time period that its content covers is so long and the content itself is so large, it would be difficult to characterize the anthology in simple terms. The inspiration for its compilation was ultimately Chinese – perhaps it was to be the Japanese answer to the *Wen-hsüan*, which also contains both prose and poetry. Unfortunately, however, the *Man'yōshū* has no preface to state the compilers' aims, and so we can only deduce from the book itself and our knowledge of its time. Several poems and all of the prose – headnotes, footnotes, correspondence, and experiments in essay and story form – are in Chinese. And the modal categories that form part of the complex (never a fully rationalized organizational scheme) are also Chinese. The book, as a book, is a product of a sinicized culture. But within this "foreign" framework is found the heart of a linguistically unadulterated native ethos, the largest concentration of what is most purely "Japanese" on the level of artistic expression to come down from these early centuries. It is this aspect of the *Man'yōshū* – its role as the repository of the living voices of all levels of society and as the embodiment of a semimystical nativist "Japanese spirit" – that has been stressed at least since the work of the national scholars in the Tokugawa period.

The Japanese content of the *Man'yōshū* consists of round numbers of approximately 260 *chōka*, 60 *sedōka*, and 4,200 *tanka*, the three

main poetic forms existing at the time of its compilation. All three forms are based on syllable count, alternating lines of five and seven syllables constituting the basic rhythm. A *tanka* (short poem) is defined as five such lines in the pattern 5–7–5–7–7. *Tanka* are numerically by far the dominant form and remained as the staple of *waka* poetry after the disappearance of the *chōka* and *sedōka*. The *sedōka* (head-repeated poem) consists of two tercets: 5–7–7–5–7–7. The *chōka* (long poem) has no set length and, as it came to be defined in the seventh century, usually took the form of a regular alternation of five- and seven-syllable lines, with an extra seven-syllable line at the end, and was often followed by one or more envoys in *tanka* form. Although numerically inferior to *tanka*, the *chōka* provided the major Man'yō poets with some of their choicest opportunities, ones that were not to be found again in Japanese poetry for a long while.

About 530 named poets are represented in the *Man'yōshū*, ranging socially from monarchs to peasants and geographically from the eastland frontier to the islands of Tsushima between Japan and Korea. There is also an exceptionally large body of anonymous poetry. Most of the named poets are men and women of the court, but the broad interest and sympathy of the compilers are evident in the inclusion of verses by outlanders and the common people. The *Man'yōshū* is often praised by the Japanese for the straightforwardness and wholeheartedness of its poetry, and indeed those qualities form an essential part of its appeal. Expressions of loyalty, admiration for nature, and amorous intent are effective partially because of their open intensity. Both nature and emotions are represented in the large in much of the most characteristic poetry. A morning-of-the-world freshness does hover about the anthology. But there is an artfulness, that is, an art, a use of conventions implying that verse after all carries expectations different from those of prose, about even simple and naive poetry, about even the generally more "primitive" poems in the chronicles. The use of preposited modifying structures – the *jo* (preface) and the *makura-kotoba* (pillow word) – is a prominent example of such artfulness. Not all poems embody such structures, but many of the apparently earliest ones do. Deliberate refraining from rhetorical adornment may itself be a sign of artistry in such a tradition: The classic repose of an apparently "simple" poem can imply conscious sophistication. Much of the best Man'yō poetry is not simple by any definition, however. The *chōka* of Hitomaro are magnificent patterns of interlocking parallelism, with a prosody heightened by skillfully used rhetorical devices, and an inner life made complex with ironies. And then there is the

sinified or actually Chinese content referred to earlier, the works of the Okura–Tabito–Yakamochi circle in the urbanized atmosphere of the Nara period. Complexity and plentitude describe the *Man'yōshū* more accurately than does simplicity or artlessness.

Among the major Man'yō poets, two define the boundaries of their tradition. Kakinomoto no Hitomaro is a bardic figure in his treatment of traditional themes of celebration and desolation,[23] the first and ultimate public poet of the Asuka period. Hitomaro is close to the past, and in him the archaic ethos of land and sovereignty finds its fullest and most powerful statement. His known poetic career spans the eleven years from 689 through 700, though no doubt he was active somewhat longer. The world of which he sings is that of the aftermath of the Jinshin war of 672. The generation between Jinshin and the move to Nara in 710 experienced one of the high points of imperial prestige in Japan under Temmu and his successors, and the image of the kami sovereign is central to Hitomaro's vision. Hitomaro's *chōka* on public themes are often laments, however, for dead princes and princesses and for the fallen capital at Ōmi. Hence the image of triumphant glory is made somber by the realization that time and death are more powerful than even the living kami in the palaces built to last myriad ages. A tension between life and death informs Hitomaro's work, ultimately resolved in compassionate irony. Hitomaro is not a nature poet. Though he employs natural imagery with great skill and beauty, he treats nature as a metaphor and as the home of humanity. Hitomaro's view is global. His universality is nowhere better exemplified than in a *chōka* (*Man'yōshū* [MYS] 2.220–2) he composed on finding the body of a man on Samine Island in the Inland Sea. The anonymous drowned man becomes Everyman in Hitomaro's poem. Hitomaro speaks elsewhere of his own experience of love and sorrow in elegies and private poems of parting. But although these poems are undoubtedly based on his life, he blends into them as a typical rather than an individual voice. There is no denying their intense emotional conviction, but they are universal rather than anecdotal. In the end Hitomaro is almost a mythic figure, an enunciator of the deepest feelings of his culture – not a man whom we can know, but a teacher of what it means to be a man, to be human.

In these regards Hitomaro stands in useful contrast with the great figure at the other end of the Man'yō tradition. Hitomaro was the

23 These terms are used as basic polarities in Japanese court poetry by Earl Miner in *Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), pp. 11 ff.

creator of the grand *chōka* manner, and later poets learned from and emulated his style. Among the many who did so was Ōtomo no Yakamochi, the putative compiler of the *Man'yōshū* itself, or at least of large parts of it. Yakamochi was born after the days of Hitomaro, after the foundation of the capital at Nara. He was a man of Nara and the scion of a proud and ancient family, one with a strong literary tradition from his father's day. Yakamochi was a man of literature, a man of the written word. He looked out on what seems a modern instead of a mythic world. Preserved through his own efforts, his many *waka*, *kanshi*, and *kambun* letters allow us to see a person passionate about poetry, his family honor, and his favorite hawk and ardent in his pursuit of a number of women. We also see him as host at official banquets and as friend of his cousin Ikenushi. Yakamochi is moody, many faceted: an individual, a modern man. He suffered from a specific and situational anxiety over his political career. It is possible to know him, or to feel that one does, in a way that is totally out of the question with Hitomaro. Thus in the simplest terms Hitomaro and Yakamochi stand for the old and the new in an age of rapid transition.

Yakamochi was aware of the past in a modern way. He looked back on it as a time of lost virtue and glory. The virtue that he particularly cherished and that he wished to revive in his own day was *masuraoburi*, the manliness of the warrior. He belonged to an ancient warrior family that was losing its way in a complex and no-longer heroic modern world. Yakamochi's idealization of the past as a time of sturdy and simple loyalty is the counterpart of his anxiety over the present and future. These attitudes give his work a restlessness and a melancholy that are alien to Hitomaro. Hitomaro seems to be discovering the world and expressing it fully for the first time; Yakamochi seems to be looking back with envy and regret. Yakamochi was a self-conscious artist. That he was aware of the debt of his tradition to Hitomaro is indicated by a remark in one of his letters that he had never passed through the gates of Yama and Kaki. "Kaki" is supposed to refer to Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, and the self-deprecatory comment is a polite salute to the long-dead singer who had set the standards of his art.[24]

"Yama" in Yakamochi's remark may refer to either Yamabe no Akahito or Yamanoue no Okura, poets of a generation intermediate between Hitomaro's and Yakamochi's own. Akahito is best known as a

24 The remark comes in a letter (written in Chinese) prefatory to MYS 17: 3969–72 and is part of an extended series of exchanges between Yakamochi and his cousin Ikenushi on the occasion of Yakamochi's illness in the second and third months of 747.

nature poet, an observer who celebrated natural beauty for its own sake. His poetry is part of a trend toward pictorializing the numinous quality of the land. Okura was a crony of Yakamochi's father Tabito and is notable as the most distinctly individual voice in the *Man'yōshū*. He created a poetry of Confucian indignation and of sympathy with the poor and the helpless. His prosody is angular and defiantly indifferent to Hitomaro's supple yet tensile periods. Okura was the most deeply sinified of the *Man'yōshū* poets, having gone to China for study in 702 with one of the recurrent official embassies. He internalized the social attitudes of Confucian propriety and of Confucian invective and incorporated them into some of the most memorable verse in the *Man'yōshū*. It is thought that Okura was of *kikajin* descent.[25]

Yakamochi seems to have thought of himself as heir to the poetic tradition and to have deliberately worked in all the styles and modes that were available to him. He is certainly the most versatile writer in the *Man'yōshū*. As a *chōka* poet he owes much to Hitomaro. He celebrated mountain scenery and local legend in the tradition of Akahito and Takahashi no Mushimaro. His amorous exchanges show him a master of the conventions of love poetry. He wrote *kanshi* and *kambun* in the style of a Chinese literatus and assumed on occasion the cloak of Confucian morality in the manner of Okura. He celebrated the companionship of friend and friend. He wrote of matters of state and of his private life. At banquets he was the genial and poetic host, as his father had been in the days of Yakamochi's boyhood at Dazai-fu in Kyushu. Yakamochi was interested in poetry in all its forms and especially in collecting the poems of the provincial commoners who served as conscript soldiers in the military system of his day. He himself experimented with the topic of the sorrows of the frontier guard. And in addition to all this, Yakamochi brought into poetry a new note of self-conscious melancholy reflection that was a sign that the tradition was expending its forces but that also was a foretaste of the aesthetic of *aware* (wistful awareness of perishable beauty) that imbued much of the courtly literature of the succeeding age. As an anthologist Yakamochi was the first of a series of literary men – Ki no Tsurayuki and Fujiwara no Teika played similar roles later – into whose hands the poetic tradition came and who passed it on with their own stamp on it.

The last poem in the *Man'yōshū* was written on New Year's Day of the year corresponding to 759; it is a felicitous banquet poem in which

25 The case for Okura as a Korean born in Paekche and brought to Japan soon after birth is argued by Nakanishi Susumu in *Yamanoue no Okura* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1973), pp. 23–45.

Yakamochi, then serving as governor of Inaba Province, wishes his subordinates endless good fortune. Ironically, the poetic tradition itself was about to undergo the most drastic curtailment in its entire history. The eighth century, despite the imposing achievements and implied stability of the imperial institution in its first "permanent" capital, was a time of recurrent political crisis. By mid-century the long-standing rivalry between the Fujiwara and the Tachibana was creating an atmosphere of continual tension. In 756 the ex-emperor Shōmu died, removing the last restraint on the ambitions of Fujiwara no Nakamaro (706–64), the adviser to Empress Kōken, Shōmu's daughter, and on the resentment of Tachibana no Naramaro (d. 757), the son of the chief minister, Tachibana no Moroe (684–757). Naramaro attemped a coup d'état against Kōken and Nakamaro the following year but failed. He and other members of the Tachibana party were put to death. The Ōtomo were allies of the Tachibana and suffered devastating losses as a result of the abortive coup. Yakamochi had refused to join the plotters, remaining loyal to his ideal of *masurao* fidelity, but as head of the Ōtomo clan he was suspect and out of favor at court. In 758 he was sent off to be governor of Inaba. This was a comedown for Yakamochi, who had already served as governor of Etchū, a superior province, ten years earlier. The rest of his career was beset by vicissitudes, and even after he died in 785 he was posthumously linked to the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, the official in charge of building a new capital to replace Nara at Nagaoka. The murder was carried out by two members of the Ōtomo clan, and Yakamochi suffered in the general disgrace by being posthumously stripped of rank and having his ashes sent into exile with his son to the Oki Islands. His titles and rank were restored in an amnesty granted in 806.

All of these events affected Japanese poetry in various and sometimes unexpected ways. The political turmoil surrounding Yakamochi after his return to the capital from his governorship of Etchū in 751 seems to have distracted him from poetry and to have led to deepening melancholy. It is possible that he felt poetry to be no longer relevant to his own life or to the events of the times. In any case, his productivity seems to have fallen off, and from 759 until his death in 785 nothing remains. It is possible that much has been lost, or he may simply have fallen silent. In any case, the history of Man'yō poetry ends long before the death of its last great exponent. The increasing popularity of composition in Chinese may also have led to the decline of interest and skill in writing *chōka*, a form that never revived significantly after

the eighth century. The first three imperial anthologies of poetry, commissioned early in the ninth century, were of *kanshi*, not *waka*.

Ironically, Yakamochi's posthumous disgrace may have preserved the *Man'yōshū* and with it the whole pre-Heian tradition of Japanese poetry. As part of the decree against the Ōtomo, Yakamochi's property was sequestered in 785, and his papers taken into government custody. It seems likely that the *Man'yōshū* was among these and thus was under official seal until after the transfer of the capital to Heian in 794. It may then have become available for scholars after the punitive edicts were rescinded in 806, surviving as the sole relic of what may have been a much larger corpus of Asuka–Nara poetry.

The major written works that have come down from the Nara period are those just described: the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the *fudoki*, the *Kaifūsō*, and the *Man'yōshū*. They will certainly serve more than adequately to represent Asuka–Nara poetry and historiography, the two principal kinds of writing. They are not the only works that were written in the period, however. There is evidence of some that did not survive, the historiographical projects of Prince Shōtoku, for instance, or the poetic collections referred to in the *Man'yōshū* and only partially incorporated into that work. Yamanoue no Okura we know was the compiler of the *Ruiju karin* (Classified forest of poetry), which has not come down to us intact.

A work that did survive and that is of some interest for a study of the poetry of the period is the *Kakyō hyōshiki*, by Fujiwara no Hamanari (724–90). *Kakyō hyōshiki* (Standard rules for the classic of songs) was written in 772 and presented to Emperor Kōnin (709–81), apparently as an authoritative statement on Japanese poetry. Hamanari, an official at the Nara court, shows more acquaintance with Chinese poetic theory than understanding of Japanese poetic practice as found in the *Man'yōshū*. He elaborates a complex theory of rhyme for *waka* and discriminates seven "poetic ills" (*kabyō*) derived from Six Dynasties criticism, setting up as well several stylistic categories.[26] Because several poems quoted in the *Kakyō hyōshiki* appear in the *Man'yōshū* with different attributions, it is quite plausible that the great anthology was unknown to Hamanari and was in fact still a

26 Hamanari's "seven ills" are certain types of phonetic repetition; his list is inspired by the "eight poetic ills" of Six Dynasties criticism first enunciated by Shen Yüeh (441–513) in *Shih p'in*. His Chinese orientation leads him to prescribe rhyme for *waka*. He allows only vowel correspondence, however, and proscribes full consonant-vowel duplication. The best study of this subject is Judith N. Rabinovitch, "Wasp Waists and Monkey Tails: A Translation and Study of *uta no shiki* (*Kakyō hyōshiki*) [772] by Fujiwara no Hamanari," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51 (1991).

private possession of his contemporary Ōtomo no Yakamochi. Hamanari, working during a period from which nothing by Yakamochi remains, shows the increasing focus on Chinese literary culture already dominating the court. The *Kakyō hyōshiki*, the earliest Japanese document in poetic criticism, is a curious product of those times. Although seriously misconceived, it has value in the history of thought as an attempt to understand one's own culture through foreign eyes. And the theory of the "poetic ills" was by no means laid to rest with Hamanari; it was still being discussed four hundred years later.[27]

The prose text of the *Kakyō hyōshiki* is in Chinese, and the poems are spelled out in phonogram (*man'yōgana*) orthography. Another *kambun* document with phonetic usages for poems, proper nouns, and the like that has come down from Asuka–Nara times is the *Jōgū Shōtoku Hōō teisetsu* (Anecdotes of the sovereign dharma King Shōtoku of the Upper Palace), a collection of records concerning Prince Shōtoku probably dating from the early eight century. It is the source of several anecdotes, often of a miraculous character, about the revered scholar-statesman-sage. In this respect it is not unlike the accounts incorporated into the *Nihon shoki* itself; both provide early evidence of what became a Prince Shōtoku cult that endured until modern times. One pious anecdote recounts how the prince, studying Buddhist texts with a Korean master, was stumped by a difficult passage in the Lotus Sutra. A golden man came to the prince in a dream and revealed the meaning of the passage. The Korean master returned to Korea with the interpretation and, on later hearing of the prince's death, prayed to die on its anniversary and meet him in the Pure Land. According to the account, this wish was granted. This Buddhist *setsuwa* is precisely the sort of narrative found in large numbers in Heian and later collections. Thus the *Jōgū Shōtoku Hōō teisetsu*, together with the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, stands at the beginning of a major strand of Japanese literature that is known to modern scholarship as *setsuwa bungaku*. It also incorporates three poems by one Kose no Mitsue on the prince's death, in this respect, too, being similar to the chronicles in exemplifying at its outset the literature's fondness for juxtaposing prose and verse. The *Jōgū Shōtoku Hōō teisetsu* consists of five textual layers, the earliest of which, genealogical in nature, probably stem from the traditions of the Hōryū-ji, Gangō-ji, and other ancient temples and date from the first

27 Fujiwara no Toshiyori (?1057–1129) discusses the concept in *Shunrai zuinō* (ca. 1115). Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) also mentions it in *Korai fūteishō* (1197). Both writers are critical of using these negative categories as guides in composition. Hashimoto Fumio, ed., *Karonshū, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1975), vol. 20, pp. 57, 357–8.

decade of the eighth century. The anecdotal strata are probably slightly later, perhaps recorded in their present form after the compilation of the *Nihon shoki* in 720. The identity of the compiler of these materials is not known.

Another minor eighth-century text of considerable interest has been preserved in a stone inscription. It consists of twenty-one devotional verses carved on a stele at the Yakushi-ji in Nara, verses that are known as the *bussokuseki no uta* after the incised representation of the Buddha's footprint (*bussokuseki*) that they accompany. They are in the syllabic form 5–7–5–7–7–7, of which they constitute the chief remaining corpus and which hence is called the "Buddha's footprint stone poem form." It consists of a *tanka* plus an extra seven-syllable line serving as a refrain. These poems are a liturgy of the circumambulation of the footprint icon and therefore of the worship of Śakyamuni, the historical Buddha, but also of Bhaisajya-guru or Yakushi, the healing Buddha. They are arranged in intricate patterns of association and progression stemming partially from their sources in the "twelve great vows of Bhaisajya-guru" as set forth in three Buddhist canonical texts. The twenty-one poems are engraved in phonogram orthography, a fact that makes them important to the study of Japanese phonology. Their date and author or authors are unknown, but the accompanying footprint stone has a *kambun* inscription dated in correspondence with 753. It has been argued that the poems are by various unknown hands, later arranged into a sequence (also by an unknown person) for artistic and doctrinal effect. The traditional attribution was to Fun'ya no Chinu (693–770), the donor of the icon stone.[28]

The *Nihon shoki* covers the history of Japan to 697. It is the first of a group of official annals known as the *Rikkokushi* (Six national histories). All are in *kambun,* and together they chronicle events from earliest times to the year 887. It is the second of these histories, the *Shoku Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan continued), that deals with the Nara period, covering the years 697–791. It was completed and presented to Emperor Kammu (737–806) in 797, just after the move to the new Heian capital. The compilation took place in several stages during the eighth century and involved at least eight scholars.[29] The *Shoku Nihongi* is principally of value as history, being (like the later

28 The most commanding study of this subject is by Roy Andrew Miller, "*The Footprints of the Buddha*": *An Eighth-Century Old Japanese Poetic Sequence* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1975).

29 Imperial commissions for this work were issued in the reigns of Junnin (758–64), Kōnin (770–81), and Kammu (781–806). The final stages of the project were under the direction of Fujiwara no Tsugutada (727–96) and Sugano no Mamichi (ca. 738–ca. 811).

chapters of the *Nihon shoki*) a chronicle of political events seen from the viewpoint of the court. Its annals are distant from the rich matrix of myth and song out of which the compilers of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* wove the fabrics of their early narratives. But it has its own linguistic and semiliterary interest as the chief repository of the *semmyō*, a form of imperial proclamation in native Yamato speech, recorded in a unique style known as *semmyōtai*. This consists of an attempt to write Japanese with a combination of semantic and phonetic uses of characters and with the occasional intrusion of Chinese grammar meant to be reinterpreted as Japanese constructions. In these respects *semmyō* resemble some of the orthography of the *Man'yōshū*. The unique feature of *semmyōtai*, however, is that particles and inflections are written small, in phonogram orthography, so that they stand out from the rest of the text and facilitate its reading. *Semmyō* were read aloud – proclaimed – in public by officials, and the quality of oral delivery apparently was considered of some importance. There are sixty-two of these proclamations preserved in the *Shoku Nihongi*. Their subjects include the elevation of a consort to the rank of empress, the dedication of the Great Buddha at the Tōdai-ji, and the announcement of the discovery of gold in Michinoku. The texts sometimes have a formal and rhetorical splendor that qualifies them for consideration as literature. Ōtomo no Yakamochi seems to have adapted Emperor Shōmu's proclamation on the discovery of gold, issued in 749, into his *chōka* on the same subject (MYS 18.4094). The text of this poem bears a close resemblance to the proclamation with its recounting of the emperor's ambition to serve his people by erecting a great Vairocana, his worry about insufficient gold for the gilding, his relief at the report of new mines, his appeal for unity among his subjects, and his hortatory account of the loyalty of the Ōtomo. Both poem and proclamation incorporate an ancient Ōtomo song:

> If we go on the sea,
> Our dead are sodden in water;
> If we go on the mountains,
> Our dead are grown over with grass.
> We shall die
> By the side of our lord,
> We shall not die in peace.[30]

30 Mikanagi Kiyotake, ed., *Semmyō shōshaku* (Tokyo: Yūbun shoin, 1936), p. 138. Yakamochi alters the last line of the song to *Kaerimi wa / seji to kotodate*, "They vowed they would never look back."

The periodic, oratorical quality of the *semmyō* of the *Shoku Nihongi* is attenuated in examples found scattered in later *Rikkokushi*, in which the linguistic purity of the *semmyō* is compromised by Chinese loanwords and the influence of *kambun* syntax. Earlier proclamations, in the *Nihon shoki*, are translated into *kambun* by the compilers, and no proclamations of this nature are to be found in the *Kojiki*. Thus the *Shoku Nihongi* remains the main repository of a significant form of literary Japanese and of Japanese literature.

Still another group of official texts should be mentioned at this point. These are the Shinto ritual prayers known as *norito*, twenty-seven of which are preserved in Book 8 of the *Engishiki*. The *Engishiki* is a collection of procedures (*shiki*) compiled in the Engi era (901–23) and completed in 927. The older among the *norito* probably date to the seventh and eighth centuries. Their texts are linguistically and orthographically similar to the *semmyō*, employing a hybrid Sino-Japanese style, with particles written small. The result is intended to be read in pure Japanese, though as with all texts discussed in this chapter, the orthographic vehicle is made up exclusively of Chinese characters, whether used semantically or phonetically. The *norito* also resemble the *semmyō* in their rhetoric, which is that of the incantation, based on the repetition of formulaic phraseology. The *norito* are prayers addressed to various kami and recited on special occasions of cultic significance. There are prayers for rich harvest, prayers to the kami of important shrines, invocations of protective kami such as those of gates, and liturgies of exorcism. A *norito* typically specifies the blessings desired and details the offerings to be made to obtain them. *Norito* also sometimes contain passages of myth. The officiant often begins by addressing the assembled priests and worshipers before taking up the burden of his petition to the kami. The language of the *norito*, solemn and designed to create a feeling of numinous awe, resembles certain passages of *Man'yōshū* poetry, particularly the *chōka* of Hitomaro. It is apparent that the author of the *Minazuki tsugomori no ōharae* (Great exorcism of the last day of the sixth month) either drew on the same source of ritual phraseology as Hitomaro did in his lament on the death of Prince Hinamishi (MYS 2.167) or that one author was familiar with the other's work. The style of the *norito* of the *Toshigoi no matsuri* (Grain-petitioning festival) is particularly evocative of the grand *chōka* manner. It is not known who composed these *norito*, but they might have been created by members of the sacerdotal Imibe and Nakatomi families or by officials of the Council of Kami Affairs

(Jingikan). In their older strata they probably took form during that fertile period when the language perfected its potential as a vehicle for ritual and, out of that, made poetry, the period of which Hitomaro was the ultimate expression.

MUSIC AND DANCE

The pervasive role of song in ancient Japanese society has already been touched on in the discussion of literature. The chronicles provide evidence of several named kinds of singing, such as "kami words" (*kamigatari*), "country measures" (*hinaburi*), "songs of yearning for the homeland" (*kunishinohiuta*), "drinking songs" (*sakagura no uta*), and "quiet songs" (*shizuuta*). A "winecup song" (*ukiuta*) accompanies the offering of a flagon to the emperor. There were also *ageuta* and *shirageuta,* in which the voice was apparently to be raised either throughout or at the end of the song, and "responses to quiet songs" (*shizuuta no utaigaishi*), thought to have been sung at a fast tempo. "Country measures" had their counterpart in "courtly measures" (*miyahitoburi*); both were named after particular songs and apparently could refer to other songs sung to those tunes. The notation "lowered part" (*kataoroshi*) presumably referred to the lowering of the voice or relaxing of the tempo in a two-part song. A more detailed notation in the *Nihon shoki* gives further insight into manner of performance: "Even now when this song is sung in the music bureau, the tempo of the hand clapping and the rise and fall of the vocal part are preserved."[31] The song in question is described as a *Kumeuta,* that is, a song traditional to the Kume clan of ancient warriors serving Yamato kings. It accompanied the *Kumemai* or "Kume dance." A primitive victory song of the Kumebe tells how enemy warriors were killed by a ruse (*Nihon shoki* 10):

> When our troops heard the song, they all drew their mallet-headed swords and killed the enemy at once. There were no enemy left. The Royal forces were overjoyed and turned their faces to the heavens and laughed. Thus they sang:
>
> Now at last!
> Now at last!
> Those fools, oh,
> Would they even *now,*
> My boys,
> Would they even *now,*
> My boys?

31 Tsuchihashi Yutaka and Konishi Jin'ichi, eds., *Kodai kayōshū,* NKBT, 3.128.

It is because of this that the Kumebe nowadays give a great laugh after singing.

The Kuzu were another group known for their songs as well as for customs regarded as quaint by the Yamato court. Living in a remote mountain area of the Kii peninsula, they came annually to court to present offerings of their native products. The presentation was accompanied by a performance similar to that of the Kumebe (*Nihon shoki* 39):

In the winter of the nineteenth year, in the tenth month, on the first day . . . the king [Ōjin] went to the palace at Yoshino. At this time the Kuzu came to court. They presented thick saké, singing:

> In the white-oak grove
> We fashion a long mortar;
> In the long mortar
> We have brewed the fine great liquor:
> See how good it is –
> Come, partake, down it with joy,
> Our father.

After they had finished singing, they beat on their mouths, threw back their heads, and laughed. Thus when nowadays on the day the Kuzu present their local products, they finish singing, beat on their mouths, throw back their heads, and laugh, it would seem they are following an ancient custom.

Several of the early songs from the chronicles are attributed to still another group, the *ama* or "seafolk," people who made their living from the sea, by fishing, diving, gathering seaweed, and making salt. Their songs, among the longest and most impressive, are narrative in nature and include variations of the customary formula:

> The bottom swimmers,
> The seafolk couriers,
> Have told the story:
> The words of the story
> Are these words.

Some of the long narrative songs contain, in their very wording, evidence of how they were acted out. Thus when the kami Eight Thousand Spears grows tired of his wife and is about to leave her, he boastfully enacts a series of scenes in which he dresses himself in various finery (*Kojiki* 4):

Dressed and about to leave, he stood, with one hand on his horse's saddle and one foot in the stirrup, and sang:

> Jet-berry black
> Is the raiment that I take

To adorn myself
In my full array;
Bird of the offing
Peering down at its breast,
Flapping its wings:
These clothes do not become me –
I cast them away,
Waves that draw down the shore.

This pattern is repeated with "kingfisher-green raiment," until finally the kami is satisfied with garments "indigo . . . pounded dye plant juice–stained." The song is rich in possibilities for mime. So too is a banquet song (*Kojiki* 42) attributed to King Ōjin in which a crab has a dialogue with a man. The crab's actions – "scuttling sideways . . . diving and gasping" – are vividly described. Highly suggestive of dance movements are these words of a song: "The Kuzu of Yoshino, seeing the sword Ōsazaki no Mikoto was wearing, sang (*Kojiki* 47):

Child of the sun
From Homuta,
Ōsazaki,
Ōsazaki,
The sword you wear
Strung from the hilt,
Swinging at the tip:
Swaying underbrush
In the bare-stemmed winter wood –
Saya! Saya!"

Specific references to dance as a command performance are found in passages such as the following (*Kojiki* 96):

Once when King Yūryaku went to Yoshino Palace there was a maiden beside the Yoshino River, and her figure was lovely. And so he wed this maiden and returned to the palace. Later when he visited Yoshino again he stopped at the place where he had met the maiden, set up a great royal camp-chair, seated himself . . . and had the young lady dance while he played on the zither. And because the lady danced well, he composed a song:

To the hand of a kami
Seated on a camp-chair
Playing the zither
She dances, this woman – oh that
This were the eternal land!

Elsewhere we see guests at a party rising one by one to dance around a fire at night:

When Yamabe no Muraji Odate was appointed governor of Harima Province, he arrived at the new residence of a commoner of that province, Shijimu by name, and gave a feast. When the feast was in full swing and the liquor was flowing freely, each guest danced in order of precedence. Now, there were two boys to tend the fire, seated by the hearth. When these boys were urged to dance, one of them said, "You, younger brother, dance first." They thus deferred to each other, and the people there assembled laughed.[32]

The songfest, *utagaki* or *kagai,* provided an occasion for singing and dancing that was part ritual, part revel, and part performance. Unmarried young men and women met and exchanged challenges in song, with sexual pairing the object. Several passages in the chronicles and the *Man'yōshū* refer to this custom either directly or obliquely. A poem by Takahashi no Mushimaro in the *Man'yōshū* (9.1759) suggests that the sexual license he observed in the annual rites at Mt. Tsukuha in Hitachi Province be extended to married couples as well:

To where eagles dwell
On the mountain of Tsukuha,
Up to the haven,
The haven of Mohaki,
Urging each other
With shouts, the youths and the maidens
Thronging together,
Go to match songs in the song match.
Because with others' wives
I shall be keeping company,
So with my own wife
Let others banter as they will.
The kami that keep
This mountain from of old
Have never interposed
Their ban against these usages.
This one day alone,
Sweetling, do not look at me,
Do not question what I do.

The *utagaki* as a theater of conflict between rivals in love is presented in a passage from the *Kojiki:*

The progenitor of the Omi of Heguri, Shibi by name, stood up at a songfest and took the hand of the fair maid whom Wake no Mikoto was going to wed. This maiden was the daughter of the Obito of Uda, and her name was Ōuo [great fish]. And so Wake no Mikoto also stood up at the songfest.[33]

32 Ibid., p 104. 33 Ibid., p. 105.

The rivals insult each other in song, building to a climax complete with taunting plays on the interloper's name (*Kojiki* 110–11):

And so Shibi no Omi, more and more enraged, sang:

> My great lord
> My prince's brushwood fence,
> With eight-knot fastening
> You may fasten it round about –
> It will cut, that brushwood fence,
> It will burn, that brushwood fence.
>
> Oh the great fish,
> Tuna-spearing fisherman –
> If she gets away
> How you'll hanker after her,
> Tuna-spearing tunaman.

Thus singing, they contended until dawn and then withdrew and went their separate ways.

Utagaki songs undoubtedly were adapted to other uses by the compilers of the chronicles, given the contextual readings in the love dramas in which those works abound. Plausibly among these are the songs placed in the mouth of Prince Kinashi no Karu, the son of King Ingyō who lusted for his sister Karu no Ōiratsume (*Kojiki* 79, 80, 84):

> Hail comes pelting down
> On the leaves of bamboo grass
> With might and main
> Once I've taken her to bed
> Let her go where she wants.
>
> That beauty so fine,
> If I can bed her, just bed her,
> Like sickled rushes
> Let the tangle tangle then,
> If I can bed her, just bed her.
>
> Sky-flying
> Karu maiden,
> Softly, softly so
> Come to me and sleep and go,
> You Karu maidens.

The existence of musical instruments to accompany songs and dances is attested to in the chronicles in such a passage as that already cited in which King Yūryaku plays on the zither. This "horizontal plucked chordophone,"[34] known as a *koto* in Japanese and called a

34 William P. Malm, *Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1959), p. 165.

ch'in in China, existed in various forms throughout east Asia. A stringed instrument of the *koto* type dating from Yayoi times has been discovered at the Toro archaeological site in Shizuoka. This early example of the *yamatogoto* or native Japanese zither apparently had six strings. An eight-stringed zither is referred to in a *Kojiki* song (no. 105). Five-stringed varieties are represented in early *haniwa* excavated at Maebashi in Gumma Prefecture. One of these shows the player holding the instrument across his lap, plucking the strings. The Chinese variety had seven strings. A much larger zither, called a *cheng* (*sō* in Japanese), had thirteen strings. Both Chinese zithers were introduced into Japan with the influx of continental music in the seventh century or earlier.

It is thought that the *koto* in ancient Japan had a significance beyond entertainment or aesthetic pleasure. The account in the *Kojiki* of the death of King Chūai suggests that the instrument was used to induce a state of divine possession. Chūai, the husband of Queen Jingū, who is famous in the tendentious accounts in the Japanese chronicles for her conquest of the Korean kingdom of Silla in the fourth century, was playing the *koto* when a divine voice commanded Chūai to cross the sea on a mission of conquest. He scoffed at the command and was cursed to death on the spot for his impiety. The narrative makes clear that the queen is possessed by a kami, which speaks through her mouth, and that the *koto* is played to achieve this effect. The king accuses the voice of belonging to a "lying kami," pushes away the zither, and stops playing. The curse immediately follows: "Go down one road." A minister of court desperately urges the king to resume playing, and he does so, though only reluctantly. But it is too late. The playing stops. Torches are brought, and it is seen that the king is dead.[35] It is clear from this account that the rite of inducing possession was conducted in the dark. Other evidence of the use of the *koto* in shamanistic spirit possession is found in the pillow word *kotogami ni* in Song 92 from the *Nihon shoki:*

> To the *koto*-head
> Comes, abides Kagehime . . .

The word *kage* in Princess Kage's name is thought to refer to the "shadow" of a kami or spirit that is drawn to the plucking of the strings. The following anonymous poem from the *Man'yōshū* seems to refer to something similar (MYS 7.1129, "On a Japanese zither"):

35 *Kojiki,* vol. 2, NKBT, 1.229.

Taking the zither,
Before all else a sigh escapes –
Can it really be
That deep down in the zither's pipe
My wife has hidden herself?

The poem suggests that not only the kami but also the spirits of dead or absent loved ones could be called forth by this instrument.

The *koto* appears elsewhere in early Japanese myth and fiction in a different formulation. In the *Kojiki*, in the second passage on descent to the underworld, the hero Ōnamuchi no Kami steals the *ama no norigoto* (heavenly speaking zither) from Susa no O, now the ruler of Ne no Katasukuni (another name for Yomi no Kuni), the Japanese Hades. As the hero flees, the zither strikes against a timber, and the resulting sound causes the earth to shake.[36] The *Utsuho monogatari*, a major work of Heian literature, later used the same motif of the zither of divine efficacy as the central unifying theme of its narrative. There, too, the playing of such an instrument causes earthquakes, wind, hail, snow, movements of stars and moon, and the appearance of supernatural beings.[37] The references in the *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū* are to the *yamatogoto* or *wagon*, the native Japanese version of the instrument, whereas those in the *Utsuho monogatari* are to the Chinese *ch'in*. That there was a special mystique attached to this instrument in China as well as in Japan is suggested by the *Ch'in fu* (Rhyme-prose on the zither) by Chi Shu-yeh (223–62), one of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove." This long evocation of the excellence of the instrument, in typically florid *fu* style, contains a version of a giant tree legend that is echoed in both the *Man'yōshū* and the *Kojiki*. The Chinese poem tells of a paulownia tree that grows on a remote mountaintop, stretching up to the North Star, drawing sustenance from the light of the sun and moon, lush, shedding blossoms in the sky, plunging its shadow into the gulf in the evening, bathing its trunk in the rising sun in the morning, standing for a thousand years. An offshoot of this tree is cut down and made into a zither, whose excellent qualities are then explained in detail.[38] This work underlies the prose texts and accompanying *waka* exchanged between Ōtomo no Tabito and Fujiwara no Fusasaki (682–738) in *Man'yōshū* 5.810–12. The first composition is sent by Tabito to Fusasaki with the gift of a *yamatogoto* and takes the form of a fantasy in

36 *Kojiki*, vol. 1, NKBT, 1.105.
37 Kōno Tama, ed., *Utsuho monogatari*, vol. 1, NKBT, 85.379–80.
38 Kokumin bunko kankōkai, ed., *Monzen*, vol. 1, in *Kokuyaku kambun taisei: bungakubu*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kokumin kankōkai, 1921), pp. 620–35.

which the *koto* becomes a maiden and speaks to the author in a dream, recounting how she was once a paulownia tree in the mountains of Tsushima, shone upon by the sun and clothed in the smoky haze. She was chopped down and fashioned into a zither and now begs only that she may have a cultivated master to play on her strings. The prose piece is accompanied by a *waka* in which the maiden asks to be allowed to pillow on the knees of a man who knows music. Tabito replies to her in a *waka* and concludes his experiment in poem-tale fiction with another *kambun* passage. The whole composition is sent off to Fusasaki, who replies in like manner. The fascination with the zither as a "speaking" instrument is clearly implied in this fantasy. A curious passage in the *Kojiki* also parallels the *Ch'in fu* description. In the reign of Nintoku an extraordinarily tall tree, whose shadow "cast by the morning sun reached Awaji Island and in the evening sun crossed Takayasu Mountain," was cut down and its lumber made into the ship *Karano*. Eventually the ship grew old in service, and its hulk was burned for salt. From the leftover timbers was fashioned a *koto* whose notes "resounded over seven leagues."[39]

Also among the instruments of archaic Japan were flutes and drums, rattles, bells, and so forth. The percussion group is supposed to be the most ancient. Bronze ceremonial bells (*dōtaku*) are familiar from late Yayoi excavations, and bell rattles (*suzu, nuride*) are referred to in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as early as the fifth century. A *haniwa* from the same site in Gumma Prefecture as that in which the *koto* player was discovered is modeled into the shape of a drummer striking a jar-shaped hip drum with a stick. This jar-shaped drum is different in configuration from the *tsuzumi* of the later musical tradition, in which the drum head projects beyond and is laced over a narrower, sometimes hourglass-shaped, core. (The Shōsōin preserves such a core in T'ang three-color glazed ceramic ware.) The *haniwa* drum may represent the sort of drum referred to in a *Kojiki* drinking song (no. 40):

> He who brewed
> This fine liquor – was it because
> He took his drum
> And standing it up like a mortar,
> Singing while he brewed,
> Did the brewing of the beer,
> Dancing while he brewed,
> Did the brewing of the beer,
> That this fine liquor,

39 NKBT, 1.283.

Fine liquor
Makes me feel so extra good?
Sa! Sa!

This passage from the account of the reign of the fourth-century queen Jingū is the earliest textual reference to a *tsuzumi*. Drums were used in the rituals of war as well as in the celebrations of peace. The longest poems in the *Man'yōshū* (2.199), a lament by Hitomaro on the death of the imperial prince Takechi in 696, mentions a *tsuzumi* in one of the series of extended similies in which the poem describes the climactic battle of the Jinshin war of 672:

The crash of drums
Signaling the soldiers to draw up
Resounded till it seemed
The sound of thunder fell upon men's ears.

The same poem also speaks of a horn called a *kuda:*

The bray of horns
Blown in blasts upon the air
Was like the snarling
Of a tiger when it spots its foe,
And the enemy
In all his multitude was seized with fear.

The word *kuda* is written with characters meaning "small horn," and the instrument was originally in fact made of animal horn, though later of bamboo. There were also "large horns" or *hara no fue*. *Fue* is the general term for a wind instrument, and an alternative reading of this above passage has *fue* instead of *kuda*. The six-holed *kagurabue* or kagura flute used in Shinto religious ceremonies is thought to date from the Burial Mound period.

To the ancient songs and dances, both sacred and secular, performed to the accompaniment of strings, flutes, and percussion instruments, was added an influx of music from the continent during the Asuka–Nara period. The arrival of musicians from the continent in Japan began much earlier, with the *Nihon shoki* recording the attendance of eighty musicians from Silla at the funeral ceremonies of King Ingyō in 453. These eighty musicians are said to have brought stringed instruments and to have taken part in the mourning ceremonies, singing, wailing, and dancing.[40] A century later the same chronicle mentions the inclusion of musicians among the learned men of Paekche

40 Ingyō 42/1, NKBT, 67.448–9. The passage states that the musicians "strung their various instruments." The character for "strung" has also been given the interpretation of "prepared."

sent in 554 as part of the "visiting professor" system.[41] Although we cannot know precisely the nature of the music they taught, any more than that of the "singing, wailing, and dancing" at Ingyō's funeral, it seems reasonable to suppose that some of the continental music was connected with Confucian ritual, as Chinese learning was the principal subject of instruction.

The year 612 provides a point of reference for the early history of music and dance in Japan, as it was then that *gigaku* was introduced by Mimashi from Paekche. Mimashi may have been of Chinese origin. In any case, it was understood that he had studied the music that he brought with him in the south Chinese kingdom of Wu. It is recorded that Mimashi set up a school at Sakurai and taught youths to dance.[42] *Gigaku* continued to be performed until the seventeenth century, but it eventually died out and apparently remained confined to the environs of Nara. It never became as widespread as its rival dance form, *bugaku*.

Gigaku was performed by dancers wearing large wooden or dry lacquer masks, of which 171 have been preserved in the Shōsō-in. Many of the remaining masks were worn at the grand dedication ceremony for the Great Buddha statue of the Tōdai-ji in 752. A long procession of costumed performers paraded about the temple precincts as part of the celebration. One aspect of *gigaku* lives on in the lion dances (*shishimai*) that are still performed in Japan. The Shōsō-in has eight *gigaku* lion masks, of which one is particularly well preserved. It has large eyes and snout and movable jaws and tongue. It measures thirty-eight by thirty-seven by thirty-three centimeters and, like other *gigaku* masks, is large enough to fit over the performer's head. Made of paulownia wood, it was originally brightly colored in various shades of red.

A more naturalistically rendered horse's head is also among the remaining *gigaku* masks. Carved from one piece of paulownia wood, it was gilded with gold leaf and decorated with patterns drawn in black ink. The piece measures 31.5 by 11.5 centimeters and has great presence with its bold eyes and flaring nostrils. Originally it had a mane and was provided with reins. Little is known about the use to which this object was put in the now-extinct art form that utilized it, but it remains a striking piece of Nara sculpture.

That other of the masks were made in Japan is evident from the names and dates inscribed on them. Six or seven are ascribed to an Ōta

41 Kimmei 15/2, NKBT, 68.109. 42 Suiko 20 (612), KNBT, 68.198–9.

Wamaro. One of these is a mask of Gokō, the duke of Wu, a principal role in the ancient dance-drama. The most prominent feature of this mask is a long, pointed nose, which combines with close-set eyes and red, smiling lips to create a lively but grotesque effect. This mask measures 27.3 by 23 centimeters, is made of paulownia wood, and was painted with verdigris (*rokushō*) over white lead (*gofun*). The association with the state of Wu in southern China is traditional, and *gigaku* is sometimes referred to as "the music of Wu" (*Kuregaku* or *Gogaku*), but Persian or Central Asian elements are suggested by the physiognomy of a mask such as this.

The mask known as the "woman of Wu" (*Kureotome* or *Gojo*), however, is of a distinctly oriental cast. Measuring 34.5 by 23.5 centimeters, it is one of the five masks attributed to Master Kiei, who is known to have been active at the time of the dedication of the Great Buddha statue of the Tōdai-ji in 752. It is probable that this mask was produced for that occasion. The face is handsomely carved in the style of the T'ang beauty, with dark eyebrows reminiscent of the Kichijōten at the Yakushi-ji; narrow, well-defined eyes under a delicately rendered epicanthic fold; a finely chiseled nose and rosebud mouth, on the latter of which the red coloring remains; and a rounded chin harmonizing the overall full but not plump proportions. Small ears are partially hidden under the black lacquer hairdo that defines the outline of the face and is crowned by twin topknots with trailing tufts. The olive-greenish cast of the complexion is similar to that of the male mask, but the absence of grotesque elements results in a very different effect. Here too the material is paulownia, and the mask can justly be ranked with the fine products of Nara woodcarving. The scene in which the character wearing this mask was wooed by the barbarian Konron apparently provided one of the high points in a *gigaku* performance, and it has been suggested that its risqué nature led to disfavor for *gigaku* as a court or temple entertainment.

Another of the standard roles was that of the "drunken barbarian king," and a mask representing this personage has been preserved. Apparently this character and his followers came out at the finale of a performance. The king wears a Phrygian cap with floral designs in verdigris, red, purple, white, and gold leaf. Deep-set eyes peer out from under knitted brows, and a pendulous nose protrudes from between prominent cheekbones. The thick lips are drawn up in a smile half-fierce and half-libidinous. A beard along the jawbone and a thin mustache, glued on with lacquer but now largely fallen out, completed this caricature of a "Western" barbarian. The paulownia wood has

been painted red, no doubt to indicate the flush of wine. There is a rhythmical force to the carving that goes beyond mere grotesquerie. The mask measures 37.7 by 22.5 centimeters.

One of the most striking *gigaku* masks is made not of wood but of dry lacquer. A creation of Shōri no Uonari, it depicts one of the eight equally drunken followers of the drunken king. Measuring 26.1 by 22.3 centimeters, the physiognomy of this mask with its almost equilateral dimensions captures with demonic force the spirit of intoxication in a smooth-cheeked youth. The surface of the dry lacquer has been painted with a bright, yellowish red, against which the eyebrows, eyes, and mouth stand out in black. Hair was originally pasted on the crown of the head and was extended downward in a still-remaining indication of sparse, uneven bangs rendered in black ink along the forehead. The eyebrows are bold, composed of numerous fine ink lines along the fully modeled brow. They swirl upward with lively rhythmic force, and beneath them the almond-shaped eyes are also slanted sharply upward. The mouth is rendered in a matching bow-shaped grimace, and the planes of the broad face – its width is emphasized by the large, thick ears – rise to high, prominent cheekbones. The black at the nostril openings of the squat nose with its slightly pendulous tip provides the final counterpoint to the red surface of this powerfully modeled expression of dionysian mischief. One of the thirty-six dry lacquer masks in the collection, this item is considered one of Uonari's outstanding creations. It obviously takes full advantage of the plasticity of its medium. Comparison with similar dated masks suggests that it was made for the Eye-opening Ceremony of 752.

Little can now be said about *gigaku* music or the manner in which its dances were performed, but they must have provided a colorful spectacle in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Nara culture. *Gigaku* was taught at Buddhist temples, being brought under the sponsorship of the Tachibana-dera, Uzumasa-dera, and Shitennō-ji soon after its introduction. The association of the foreign musical and dance form with the foreign religion is no doubt relevant to the role that Buddhism played as a cultural force in the Asuka–Nara period. Music and dance as entertainment and spectacle remained associated with temples and gave rise to the noh drama in medieval times. Music was also an essential part of the services themselves: as rituals of comfort for the souls of the deceased, as a way to create an atmosphere of reverence and mystery, and as an earthly enactment of the divine music depicted in Buddhist art. *Shōmyō*, a liturgical Buddhist chant, was introduced in 736 and was influential in the development of Japanese musical styles.

That the importation of musical forms was part of the general influx of continental culture during the seventh and eighth centuries is indicated by other early references, such as to the introduction of *Toragaku* (Tora may refer to a state in present Burma; another theory holds that it refers to Cheju Island off the south coast of Korea), a form of unknown origin, in 661. *Toragaku* was being included in court concerts as late as 763 but had died out by the ninth century. Of more lasting importance was *gagaku*, being performed at court by 702. *Gagaku* (elegant music) became the designation of the standard varieties of court music as they were developed and survived through the centuries to modern times. Like *gigaku* it accompanied performances of masked dancers (*bugaku*), but it developed as a purely instrumental ensemble art (*kangen*) as well. Although *gagaku* means "elegant music" and has remained associated with the court aristocracy, its origins are in the popular music of China during the T'ang dynasty. T'ang music itself was strongly influenced by central Asian traditions and instruments, so that the "classical" court music of Japan is, in its origins, a composite of many musical cultures. The visual impact of central Asian music is still vividly present at Buddhist sites in Sinkiang and western China. Cave temples such as those at Kizil north of Kucha in the T'ien Shan and at Tunhuang in Kansu preserve wall paintings of paradise scenes in which heavenly musicians perform on four and five-stringed *p'i-p'a*, zithers, *yüan-hsien*, hand-held harps, panpipes, transverse and vertical flutes, and various percussion instruments. Dancers sway, swirl, spin, and cavort, and *apsaras* fly through the air, trailing scarves and strumming on *p'i-p'a*. These scenes are glorifications of the actual musical culture of the Western Regions, a culture that revolutionized T'ang music, whose own tradition had been soberly Confucian. The oasis culture of central Asia was in fact the fountainhead of much of the subsequent music of east Asia. Its distant descendants are the vigorous dance music of present-day Sinkiang and the sedate sonorities of Japanese *gagaku* and related forms preserved in Korea. Certain characteristics of *gagaku* style, however, such as the importance of time units marked off by the scheduled entrance of stereotyped passages in the strings, suggest a connection even with southeast Asian music.

One significant difference between present-day *gagaku* and the music heard at the Nara court lies in the richer variety of instrumentation then available. In addition to the double-reed flute known as the *hichiriki*, the mouth organ (*shō*), transverse flutes, the thirteen-stringed *koto*, the four stringed *biwa*, the small barrel drum (*kakko*),

the bronze gong (*shōko* or *daishōko*), the hanging drum (*tsuridaiko*), and the large frame drum (*dadaiko*) in the present *gagaku* ensemble, there were a number of no-longer used wind, string, and percussion instruments, some capable of playing in a lower register than is now characteristic of this high-pitched musical art.

Both the *hichiriki*, a short double-reed flute producing an astonishing volume of high-pitched sound, and the mouth organ existed in larger versions in the Nara *gagaku* orchestra as well as in the forms known today, and these larger instruments played an octave or more lower than the types now in use. An ancient harp known as the *kugo* also produced pleasingly dulcet notes. The ancient *biwa* (Ch: *p'i-p'a*), a member of the lute family of Persian origins, spread through central Asia and China, reaching Japan as part of the *gagaku* orchestra, and has undergone various subsequent modifications during its long history in Japanese music. One highly ornate example preserved in the Shōsō-in is the five-stringed variety orginating in India. This instrument, of which the Shōsō-in has the sole surviving example, has a straight rather than a bent neck, and a somewhat narrower sound box than that of the four-stringed type.

Also among the Nara instruments was the four-stringed *genkan* (Ch: *yüan-hsien*, named after one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove) with its long neck and circular sound box.[43] The *genkan*, like the *biwa*, belongs to the lute family and is widely distributed in East Asia. Of the *kugo*, a vertical harp of Sassanian origins, only a fragment remains in the Shōsō-in collection, though it, like the other ancient instruments described here, has recently been reconstructed and played in ensemble.[44] Its twenty-three strings were attached diagonally between a vertical upright and a projecting horizontal arm. The instrument was placed between the legs of a seated player, supported on one shoulder, and played with both hands on opposite sides in the manner of the widely distributed varieties of harp to which it is related in Europe, Africa, and elsewhere. The stringed instruments also included the seven-stringed Chinese *ch'in* and the *shiragigoto* from the Korean state of Silla, both being types of zither. All stringed instruments were played by plucking.

43 The so-called Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove were a troupe of aesthetes who withdrew from the troubles afflicting China in the third century into the consolations of music, drink, and philosophical speculation. Yüan Hsien was famous as a musician and maker of musical instruments. He is reported to have invented the instrument named after him.

44 Such a recital took place at the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka on February 15, 1986. Much valuable information on the music and instruments is available in the concert program, "Reigaku: Kodai gakki no fukugen to ensō."

Among the wind instruments, the mouth organ or *shō* (Ch: *sheng*) has remained important to the *gagaku* orchestra. This visually striking instrument consists of a bowl-shaped mouthpiece attached to seventeen bamboo pipes of varied lengths. The pipes have finger holes, and the instrument is played by selectively covering them while drawing air in and out of the mouth, producing chords of a reedy quality. The larger variety of *shō*, called the *u*, could be up to 92 centimeters in length and produced truly organlike tones an octave lower than those of the *shō*. The mouth organs had their origins in Indochina and, like other continental instruments, reached Japan by way of China.

One of the most interesting and melodious of the ancient wind instruments is the *haishō*, a set of eighteen bamboo panpipes reconstructed from a fragment in the Shōsō-in. This is closely analogous to the instrument known in ancient Greece and widely distributed throughout the world. The player blows into the pipes while moving the instrument back and forth to produce high or lower notes.

The modern *gagaku* transverse flute, the *ryūteki*, like its ancient analogue preserved in the Shōsō-in, is a reedless bamboo cylinder of Indian origin, widely distributed in various forms throughout east Asia.

The Nara orchestra also included the vertical *dōshō*, a larger version of which, the *shakuhachi*, is still extensively played outside the *gagaku* tradition. This reedless end-blown bamboo flute exists in many parts of the world. The ancient Japanese variety used in *gagaku* may be of Indian origin. Unlike the modern *shakuhachi*, it has one of its six finger holes on the underside.

In addition to the percussion instruments of the modern *gagaku* orchestra, the Shōsō-in preserves, as we noted earlier, the hourglass-shaped ceramic core of a drum. This drum was known as the *jiko* (ceramic drum) and was placed horizontally on a drum stand and played with sticks on its hide-covered ends. The extremely ancient Chinese bell rack was also part of Nara *gagaku*. Sixteen metal bells of graduated sizes were suspended in two tiers and struck with a hard instrument to produce pure and resonant chimes tones. This musical device is known as the *henshō* (Ch: *pien-chung*). A similar arrangement, known variously as the *hōkyō* (Ch: *fang-hsiang*) or *hōkei* (Ch: *fang-ch'ing*), used suspended rectangular metal pieces instead of bells. The notes produced when struck are sharp and short.

The continental music played at the Nara court was part of an international idiom, maintained by frequent contacts with China. Many aspects dropped out as the art became isolated from its countries

of origin in the Heian period and then fossilized with the later decline of imperial sponsorship. In its eighth-century heyday, *gagaku* must have provided an auditory experience as rich and exotic as the paintings and statuary in Buddhist temples were overpowering in visual terms. In 701 a Gagakuryō (Bureau of court music) was set up on the T'ang model. In the new Chinese-style administration, music was to serve the state in addition to cult and community. In a determined gesture toward self-conscious cultural improvement, the Taihō code of 702 recommended the private study of *koto* music as an act of personal cultivation. In this, too, the beginning of the eighth century marks a major hinge of time, for such a thought would have been far from the archaic cultural matrix in which music served its traditional unexamined social function.

In a broad sense, the term *gagaku* is used to refer to the whole cluster of musical arts sponsored by the court, including those of native origin such as *kagura* and *azuma-asobi*. But in the strict sense, *gagaku* refers to the group of continental musical forms that reached Japan during the Asuka–Nara period. Those of Chinese and southeast Asian origin are referred to as *Tōgaku* (T'ang music), and those stemming from Korea and northeast Asia are referred to as *Komagaku* (Korean music). These categories are also known respectively as "music of the left" and "music of the right." These musics were based on a modal structure in which there were two types, called *ryo* and *ritsu*. Each of these divisions subsumes three of the six twelve-tone Chinese scales that came into Japan with *gagaku* itself. The ordering of tones within the scale determined the mode based on it and underwent considerable modification in Japan during the Heian period.

In present-day *gagaku* the modal complexity of the different categories of music varies. *Kagura* is the simplest, with one modal structure, whereas *Komagaku* uses three modes, and *Tōgaku,* five. The situation in the Nara period is difficult to assess because of the lack of surviving musical notation. Presumably the structural symmetry that is such a prominent feature of *gagaku* as it exists today also characterized it then. The symmetry takes the form of a fourfold repetition of dance movement in *bugaku*. The *bugaku* performance is oriented to the four directions, not to a stage "front." It is very likely that the present pace of performance, as in noh drama, is considerably slower than was the case when the art was a living part of the cultural scene of its day. Nevertheless, *gagaku* has no doubt always been characterized by a sense of deliberate majesty, with large and colorful dance costumes, along with hand-held properties and masks, exploited to the full for a

complementary visual effect in the dance. As in *gigaku*, the stories enacted in the dance are of exotic continental origin. They are classified as "civil dances" (*bun no mai*), "military dances" (*bu no mai*), "running dances" (*hashirimai*), and "child dances" (*dōbu*), as well as dances of the left or right. The performance of *gagaku* music and dance was taken up by the aristocracy as private entertainment, and Heian works such as *The Tale of Genji* are replete with colorful descriptions. It is not known to what extent this practice of private performance existed in pre-Heian times.

An official entertainment participated in by the men and women of the Nara court was a form of group dance known as *tōka*. Introduced from China in 693, its Japanese version incorporated elements of the native *utagaki*, the rustic song-matches that now, like much else in the urban atmosphere of the Nara period, became the object of cultural curiosity and pastoral condescension. The customs of the countryside were suddenly perceived as different from those of the city and ripe for aristocratic patronage or experiment. Performances of *tōka* were held during the first month as part of the New Year ceremonials and continued to be popular from Tempyō to early Heian times. Also during this period the court was entertained by performances of *sangaku*, theatricals of Chinese origin that included acrobatics and juggling. *Sangaku* was excluded from court patronage in 782, perhaps because of the earthy nature of some of its skits, and its performers led a wandering existence until they attached themselves to Buddhist temples. *Sangaku* is the remote ancestor of *sarugaku* and, through it, of the noh drama.

By the time of the Eye-opening Ceremony at the Tōdai-ji in 752, musical life at the Nara court was a complex of native and imported forms. Among the former were *kagura*, *saibara*, *azuma-asobi*, *Kuzuuta*, *Kumeuta*, *ōuta*, and *tatebushi*. Alongside these were the music and dance from abroad – *gigaku*, *sangaku*, *Tōgaku*, *Komagaku*, *shōmyō*, and such presumably exotic but now obscure musical forms as *Rin'yūgaku*, *Toragaku*, and *Bokkaigaku*. The Gagakuryō was in charge of them all. The imported forms were eventually either consolidated under the aegis of *gagaku*, or left the court for a wandering existence (*sangaku*), or died out (*gigaku*). The native forms entered a dual existence, as village shrine music (*sato-kagura*) became distinguished from the official *mikagura* of court or as folksongs like *saibara* and *azuma-asobi* were formalized and solemnized as part of *gagaku* in the broad sense. This subsuming of popular culture into high culture is one of the most persistent motifs of Japanese history. It was already well under way in the Nara period, partially owing to the massive infusions

from advanced civilizations that helped create an instant elite in the capital, and a concomitant penchant for cultural primitivism that has persisted in one guise or another to our own day. The Kuzu might come to court and sing their quaint songs, but by the eighth century, scholars and professional musicians had begun to understand that such local products were of essentially anthropological interest.