

## Reappropriating the Japanese Myths Motoori Norinaga and the Creation Myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*

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磯前 順一

*How are myths understood? This essay examines the centrality of Motoori Norinaga's interpretation of the Japanese myths for present-day understandings of these myths. It shows that Norinaga's theories and his preference for the Kojiki over the Nihon shoki in reflecting his theory of mono no aware (the pathos of things) continues to influence our interpretation and evaluations of these texts and their contents. It argues for the need of a meta-history, a study of how interpreters have attempted to understand the myths, rather than attempting to recover the "original" contents or meanings of these texts and their myths.*

**Keywords:** myth — *Kojiki* — *Nihon shoki* — Motoori Norinaga — *mono no aware*

IN MANY RESPECTS, changes in the interpretation of classic Japanese myths in the late eighteenth century paved the way for the intellectual modernity of Japan. Indeed, our understanding of the myths today derives largely from the interpretation of Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801).

Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware* 物のあはれ (sometimes translated as "the pathos of things") has been especially influential. In his annotation of the passage of the *Kojiki* 古事記 in which Yamato Takeru no mikoto cries when learning that his father, the emperor, wished him dead, Norinaga extolled the prince's sense of *mono no aware*. "Because Yamato Takeru's bravery and sincerity never wavered," wrote Norinaga, "he entirely fulfilled his father's expectations of victory. Nevertheless, Yamato Takeru resented what was to be resented and, crying,

\* This article is a modified version of ISOMAE 1998 prepared for the *JJRS*. It was translated from Japanese by Sarah E. Thal, in consultation with the author.

lamented what was to be lamented. This is true human feeling.”<sup>1</sup> The exploits of Yamato Takeru as related in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 share many similar motifs, but the tale of Yamato Takeru as a whole has a very different construction in each text. In the *Nihon shoki*, a brave Yamato Takeru enjoys his father’s deep, abiding trust; in the *Kojiki*, he becomes a tragic figure exiled by his father (SAIGŌ 1973). Norinaga chose to emphasize the *Kojiki* version of the tale, reading it as a paean to a tragic hero.

Norinaga selected the *Kojiki* because the construction of the text made it possible for him to introduce his own style of emotionality, to read into it his theory of *mono no aware*. This did not mean that the *Kojiki* itself had been created as a tragic tale. Indeed, as Hans Robert JAUSS has pointed out, “Only with the mediation of the reader does a work... enter into the constantly changing horizon of experience” (1970; in KUTSUWADA 1976, p. 30). One must always make a distinction between the text itself and the commentaries that are applied to it. What can be understood from an interpretation is in the end less the text itself than the worldview of the interpreter.<sup>2</sup> For at the time of interpreting, the interpreter chooses and compiles a text that makes possible the projection of his or her own worldview.

Today people feel an affinity for the *Kojiki* and feel distanced from the *Nihon shoki*. Books for popular audiences as well as scholarly treatises have generally been based on the *Kojiki*. This is because we are reading the *Kojiki* as an emotional novel, in accordance with Norinaga’s theory of *mono no aware*. As we read into the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* the inner feelings of the characters, we share Norinaga’s understanding as epitomized in his commentary on the tale of Yamato Takeru. This affective approach to the ancient texts laid the basis for the emotional debates on the nature of the heroic age that repeatedly played out during the postwar era. The debate between Ishimoda Shō and Tōma Seita, for instance, revolved around whether or not the Yamato Takeru of the *Kojiki*, seen as a national hero, committed himself to a tragic death in the face of state authority.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, when we read the tale of Yamato Takeru in the *Nihon*

<sup>1</sup> See Motoori Norinaga’s *Kojikiden*, in *Norinaga zenshu*, v. 1, p. 219. Norinaga refers here to the passage translated by Basil Hall CHAMBERLAIN (1981) as Section LXXXII—Emperor Keikō.

<sup>2</sup> Following HEIDEGGER (1988) I understand the act of interpretation as completing the understanding of the conscious subject. In seeing worldviews as always created in relation to the times, I share the same standpoint as DILTHEY (see 1960, p. 82).

<sup>3</sup> See TŌMA 1953 and ISHIMODA 1989. Ishimoda understands the depth of literariness directly from the viewpoint of the “individual liberty” of the characters (see KURODA 1971, pp. 290–95).

*shoki*, we, like Norinaga, feel a distance. However, it would be an abuse of our authority to then conclude that the *Nihon shoki* lacks literary character as a myth. On the whole, interpreters unknowingly impose their own value norms on a past of a different character. The words of KARATANI Kōjin explain this concisely: “When we read what is called premodern literature,” he writes, “we feel as if it lacks ‘depth.’... What does it mean to say that their literature has no ‘depth’? We cannot return to their ‘reality’ or ‘inner feelings,’ nor should we forcibly read a ‘depth’ into their literature. On the contrary, we should inquire what ‘depth’ is and by what it is achieved” (1988, p. 191). Especially in research in intellectual history, there is a startling tendency “to familiariz[e] the unfamiliar” in the name of tradition (HAROOTUNIAN 1978, p. 67). Clearly, this tendency has given birth to the dogmatization of the worldview of the textual interpreter. What is needed now is to avoid imposing our own gaze once again. We must instead recognize that the viewpoints that have become so widespread were actually the personal ideas of the interpreters themselves.

It is a fact that, from the time the text known as the *Nihon shoki* was compiled as an official, national history in the Nara period until the first part of the Edo period, it has continually occupied a position as a classic. If we feel discomfort with this text, it is not due to a lack of literary merit or other deficiency in the text itself. Instead, our discomfort arises from the peculiarities of our own understanding, which differs from the understanding of the myths in ancient times. The gaze of the understanding subject should not suppress the differences between it and the object of its understanding. Once we have recognized that the interpretation of texts is a means for the interpreter to understand his own values, then the switch in the middle of the Edo period from the *Nihon shoki* as the most widely interpreted text to the *Kojiki* can be more easily understood. Freed from theoretical disputes over historical precedence, we can understand the shift from the *Nihon shoki* to the *Kojiki* as a turning from the ancient image of the myths to an early modern, indeed a modern, image of the myths.

In this essay, I would first like to clarify the understanding of the myths in the early modern and modern periods through a consideration of Norinaga’s theory of the Ancient Way (*kodōron* 古道論). Then, by comparing the early modern and modern view with the understanding of the myths in the ancient period, I would like to consider the transfigurations the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* underwent throughout the ages, as well as the process of that change.

*Motoori Norinaga's Exposition of the Ancient Way*

When analyzing the intellectual stance of an individual, one must take care not to separate that person's words into fragments, but instead to ask by what logic his argument is constructed and how his worldview is assembled. Norinaga's works on the Ancient Way can be classified into three genres: annotated translations, epitomized by the *Kojikiden* 古事記伝; Shinto writings, such as *Tamakushige* 玉くしげ or *Naobi no mitama* 直毘靈; and his compiled text, *Kamiyo no masagoto* 神代正語. Studies of Norinaga have tended to emphasize the objectivity of the annotations and the subjectivity of the Shinto works, or, based on a different method of assessment, have addressed the former within the field of Japanese literature and the latter as intellectual history.

However, as clarified by Norinaga's own statements, the *Kojikiden*—his grand annotated translation—did not exist in isolation, but in the end embodied the development of his approach to Shinto thought and the compilation of texts.<sup>4</sup> Of course today, even in the areas of philology and positivist historiography, there is no room for a simple objectivity that eschews subjectivity (see WHITE 1978). In this section, I address Norinaga's Shinto works as the culmination of his annotation and translation activities, placing *Tamakushige* at the center of my argument. In this work, written in 1787, Norinaga aimed at a theory of government, which he explained from the viewpoint of the existential constructs of the world and the patterns of human life that act in concert with them. At the time he wrote *Tamakushige*, Norinaga was finishing his annotation and translation of the "Age of the Gods" volume of the *Kojikiden* and, based upon the results of that research, he held his ground in various disputes with Confucianists and nativist scholars. Thus, *Tamakushige* was a work from the period in which Norinaga firmly established his approach to the Ancient Way.

THE WAY OF SINCERITY

What Motoori called the Ancient Way, or "the way of sincerity," was a selfless attitude in which "in general, one does not depend upon one's personal judgment for any action" (*Tamakushige*, in *Norinaga zenshū*, v. 8, p. 321). Based on this attitude, "when both vassals and the common people... identify with the emperor's will and, earnestly respecting the imperial court, obey the rule of the emperor,... then those above and those below will be in harmony, the realm will be aus-

<sup>4</sup> See Motoori Norinaga's *Uiyama fumi*, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, v. 1, p. 5, and *Kamiyo no masagoto*, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, v. 7, pp. 488–89.

piciously governed” (*Tamakushige*, p. 321) and order will be introduced into the world.

The foundation of this order was the emperor. “Because this age, this realm and its people exist above all due to the benevolence of [the imperial ancestor] Amaterasu Ōmikami,” wrote Norinaga, “there can be no individual ownership” (*Tamakushige*, p. 319). Mythically ordained as the land’s sole sovereign, the emperor fulfills the function of denying the egotistical desires of all humans, from the warrior ruling classes to the commoners. Above all else, the emperor himself is made into a selfless executor who “takes the will of the heavenly deities as his own. The Emperor does not deal with matters according to his own will, but acts and governs according to the precedents of the Age of the Gods” (*Naobitama*, in *Norinaga zenshū*, v. 9, p. 49; NISHIMURA 1991, p. 28). Following this line of logic, then, in Norinaga’s idealized Japan, a person who can assert his personal desires does not conceptually exist.

Norinaga found a mythological basis for the emperor’s status as sole sovereign of the realm in the foundation myths and the myth of the descent of the imperial grandson of Amaterasu:

Heaven and earth, all the gods and all phenomena, were brought into existence by the creative spirits of two deities—Takami Musuhi no Kami and Kami Musuhi no Kami. The birth of all humankind in all ages and the existence of all things and all matter have been the result of that creative spirit... It was the original creativity of these two august deities which caused the deities Izanagi and Izanami to create the land, all kinds of phenomena, and numerous gods and goddesses at the beginning of the Age of the Gods.

(*Tamakushige*, p. 309; TSUNODA 1958, p. 521)

First, Norinaga asserted that Izanagi and Izanami, receiving the power of Takami Musuhi no Kami and Kami Musuhi no Kami, who wield the power of creation, themselves give actual birth to the realm and all things. Then Izanagi’s child, Amaterasu Ōmikami, appears as the sun goddess who rules the heavens (*Takama ga hara*) and illuminates the world. “Amaterasu Ōmikami directed her imperial grandson to govern the Abundant Reed Plain (*Ashihara nakatsu kuni*, i.e., the earth), so he descended from the heavens to the land,” continued Norinaga. “In the oath that Amaterasu Ōmikami made at this time, she pronounced the reign of the imperial throne coeternal with heaven and earth. This oath is itself the great, fundamental essence of the Way” (*Tamakushige*, p. 310). Amaterasu Ōmikami entrusted control of the land to her imperial grandson Ninigi, and he, accepting the commission,

descended to earth. According to Norinaga, actual history proved the unbroken continuity of the imperial line as foretold by Amaterasu. “Although the great imperial country—as stated in the sacred oath of its eternal existence—has persisted through ten thousand generations,” he wrote, “lords are still lords and vassals are still vassals. There has been no change in their positions” (*Kuzuhana*, in *Norinaga zenshū*, v. 8, p. 146).

Norinaga’s redactions of the myths, beginning with the scene of the creation deities at the opening of his history of the age of the gods in the *Kojikiden*, were modeled primarily on the *Kojiki*, with alternate texts from the *Nihon shoki* deployed at important junctures.<sup>5</sup> The epitome of this mixing of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is his treatment of Amaterasu Ōmikami’s sacred oath. This oath, which Norinaga considered the guarantee of an eternal imperial line, appears not in the *Kojiki*, nor even in the main text of the *Nihon shoki*, but is taken from an alternate variant in the *Nihon shoki*.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, by introducing an alternate variant into the myth that relates the ceding of the land by the reigning deity, Ōkuninushi no mikoto, to Amaterasu’s grandson, Norinaga transformed the myth into a covenant assigning the “visible world” (*arawenigoto* 顯事) to Ninigi and the “invisible world” (*kamigoto* 幽事) to Ōkuninushi no mikoto (*Kamiyo no masagoto*, p. 526; *Tamakushige*, pp. 320–21; *Nihon shoki*, second alternate variant of section 9, p. 151; ASTON 1956, p. 80). In this way, although Norinaga focused on the text of the *Kojiki*, by weaving in alternate versions from the *Nihon shoki*, he was able to find written in the text his own interpretation: that the imperial house, as the highest existence in the human world, would continue forever.

Thus, Motoori’s interest lay in using myth-history to legitimize an attitude of selflessness, that is, a Way that supports order. For this purpose, he wrote about the creation of the land and its inhabitants as well as the establishment of the right of sovereignty, asserting the appropriateness of the imperial house as the ruler of Japan due to its genealogical link to the creator deities. Yet, this is not to say that Norinaga treated the emperor as an historical human subject. Until the very end, he espoused the imperial system only as a way to expound the unselfishness of the Japanese people, the emperor system as an apparatus of selflessness.

<sup>5</sup> The *Nihon shoki* consists of a main text, frequently supplemented by alternative variants (*arufumi*) of the same story. (Translator’s note.)

<sup>6</sup> See *Kamiyo no masagoto*, in *Norinaga zenshū*, v. 7, p. 528; *Tamakushige*, p. 310; and *Nihon shoki*, first alternate variant of section 9 (volume 1, p. 147; ASTON 1956, p. 77). All citations from the *Nihon shoki* are taken from the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (NKBT), vols. 67–68.

## MONO NO AWARE

Since the development of medieval Shinto thought, it has been commonplace to understand the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as norms for a way of individual life. Within this interpretive tradition, Suika Shinto, Confucian Shinto, and Norinaga's thought are all closely related, attaching great importance to the way of the ruler and the ruled with respect to the emperor. Norinaga's innovation lay not in his emphasis on the way of the sovereign and the subject itself, but in the foundations that he proposed for that way (MURAOKA 1939, pp. 185–89; YASUMARU 1992, pp. 48–49).

In Norinaga's work, the way of sincerity was supported from within by the aesthetic of *mono no aware*. "The understanding of *mono no aware* extends in its broadest sense to the way of governing oneself, one's household, and the country as well," he wrote. "When [the ruler] sympathizes with the toil and suffering of the people, then there will be no unbenevolent ruler."<sup>7</sup> Norinaga believed that, given a *mono no aware*-like sensitivity, people will naturally feel sympathy and concern for others, and harmony will be brought to society. *Mono no aware* is something that acknowledges the movements of the heart and mind without suppressing them. This does not mean that *mono no aware* makes permanent any particular emotion. Rather, as Motoori himself stated, "*aware* is to be moved by things" (*Genji monogatari tama no ogushi* 源氏物語玉の小櫛, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 202): at issue is not the content, but "the degree, the depth of feeling" itself (KANNO 1991, p. 185).

Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware* was developed in his works on the *Tale of Genji* and poetics. Although the word itself does not appear, the concept occupies an important place in his works on the Ancient Way as well (SAGARA 1978, pp. 155–208). For instance, in one passage of *Tamakushige*, Norinaga stated that, long ago, every movement of the heart was recognized, whether enjoyable or sad, and that this sensitivity to feelings was a fundamental characteristic of human beings in their original form. "In ancient times when the hearts of people were naive and not yet adulterated with doctrines from other lands," he wrote, "there was no useless, devious thought of indiscriminately creating theories about where people go after death. When they died, people simply went to the Land of Yomi, and there was nothing to do but pre-

<sup>7</sup> See *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi*, in *Norinaga zenshū*, v. 4, p. 225. *Tama no ogushi* amplifies Norinaga's early work, *Shibun yōryō*, but, as is evident from its completion date of 1797, it occupies a place in the final years of the period in which he studied the Ancient Way. From this standpoint, then, one may quite naturally understand Norinaga's statements in *Tama no ogushi* as expressions that have resulted from Norinaga's writings on the Ancient Way.

pare themselves for it and grieve" (*Tamakushige*, p. 316). He went on to criticize harshly the Confucian-like demeanor that suppresses individual feelings: "To esteem and consider it good to not rejoice at anything joyful, to not grieve over anything sorrowful, to be unmoved by anything surprising; these are all foreign fallacies. They are superfluous; they do not exist in the true nature of people" (*Tamakushige*, p. 316).

In Norinaga's theory, the most profound aspect of *mono no aware* was the deep emotion prompted by "anything that does not follow one's desires," as, for instance, in sadness or love (*Genji monogatari tama no ogushi*, p. 202). He cited as the prototype of sadness-like *mono no aware* the mortal parting of Izanagi and Izanami in the *Kojiki*. "Since they will without fail go to the defiled land of Yomi, there is nothing so sad as death in this world" (*Tamakushige*, p. 316). The grief of Yamato Takeru mentioned above was also the same.

A world ordered on the feelings of individuals was precisely what formed the horizon of Norinaga's studies of the Ancient Way. To borrow the words of MARUYAMA Masao: "[Norinaga] elevated the sense of *mono no aware*, which was 'the essence of Japanese poetry,' to the level of the essence of Shinto itself.... If this can for the time being be called a 'politicization of literature,' with Norinaga this politicization... [means] that the principle of literature (that is, the sense of *mono no aware*) is to be validated as a political principle" (1952, pp. 173-74; HANE 1974, pp. 170-71). Because of what Maruyama calls its literary character, we are today still captivated by Norinaga's explication of the myths. The interiority and emotions that Norinaga read into the protagonists of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* could appear in a modern novel: in that respect, Norinaga was the progenitor of modern interpretation.

Yet, although he generalized the *mono no aware*-like emotionality of "ancient times when the hearts of people were naive," the relevant passages that Norinaga actually cited in the myths included, even in the *Kojiki*, only the death parting of Izanagi and Izanami and a few others. One must conclude that, based on a few scattered references, Norinaga over-exaggerated the presence of *mono no aware*-like understanding in his interpretation of the myths. By extending *mono no aware*-like sensitivity to the age of the gods in its entirety, Norinaga introduced into the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* an interiorized understanding of the appearing characters.

#### THE WORLDVIEW OF THE NON-RULING STRATA.

While the basis of *mono no aware* can be seen broadly in *jōruri* plays and other elements of the culture of the non-ruling classes, Nori-



naga's theory stands out because of its stance of self-criticism. After having examined the cultural background of Norinaga's *mono no aware* argument, HINO Tatsuo concluded:

The desire to rescue human emotions from the restraints of public norms...flows through popular culture in any era.... The reception of the classics of *jōruri*, *haikai* 俳諧, and vernacular works (*zokugebon* 俗解本) as reaffirmations that even adultery is love has its roots, after all, in this characteristic of popular culture.... I have no doubt that the precursor of Norinaga's argument about 'knowing *mono no aware*' can be found in this aspect of the contemporary popular culture to which Norinaga was closely attached. (1984, p. 205)

Thus, the worldview of Norinaga was based on popular culture, not the ethics of the ruling classes apparent in Confucianism.

In fact, Norinaga did not espouse *mono no aware* only to glorify sentimentality, but to avoid an overreliance on human logic. He used the concept to criticize Confucianism as blind faith in reason—that is, as a rigorist subjugation to reason that ignores the fundamental sensitivity of human beings (see *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi*, p. 193). In contrast, he understood spontaneous *mono no aware*-like sensitivity as a natural force that sweeps rigidity away. Because all existence is influenced by this natural creative force, Norinaga placed a single creative deity (Musuhi no Kami) at the very beginning of his interpretation of the myths (*Kamiyo no masagoto*, p. 491).

In accordance with their status in this world, all living things... know and carry out what they should do in order to live, and this is thanks to the power of Musuhi no Kami. Of all living beings, humans are especially superior, and in accordance with our superior ability, we know and do what we should know and do. Why pursue the matter any further?

(*Naobi no mitama*, p. 59; NISHIMURA 1991, pp. 37–38)

Because Norinaga posited an original deity, Musuhi no Kami, as the source of all beings, encompassing the creation of heaven and earth, he reasoned that humans are endowed at birth with the way of sincerity. Thus the practice of the Way became a simple activity that does not require rigid application, for, "On the whole, the kami...rejoice in the people of the world freely enjoying themselves" (*Tamakushige*, p. 323). It is clear that although Norinaga couched his description of the social order in Confucian terms such as "the way of lord and subject, father and son, and the rest" (*Kuzuhana*, p. 136), the process that he

proposed for attaining that ideal arrangement differs fundamentally from Confucianism.

Creator deities (*musuhi no kami* 産巢日の神) appear in the opening passage of the *Kojiki*. However, one cannot say that the creator deity (Musuhi no Kami) as Norinaga understood it adheres to what appears in the *Kojiki*. In the opening of the *Kojiki*, three deities—Amenominakanushi no Kami, Takami Musuhi no Kami, and Kami Musuhi no Kami—appear together, but Norinaga reread them as a single original deity, Musuhi no Kami. Thus, Amenominakanushi no Kami lacks any concrete meaning, and even the two deities, Takami Musuhi no Kami and Kami Musuhi no Kami, are actually seen as one (*Kuzuhana*, p. 131). Likewise, in the text of the *Kojiki*, the narrative begins at a point where heaven and earth are already separate, but Norinaga, by introducing the main text of the *Nihon shoki*, rendered his single creator deity, Musuhi no Kami, as an existence that preceded the separation of heaven and earth (KŌNOSHI 1986, p. 43).

In the opening of the *Kojiki*, the *musuhi no kami* and other deities remain fundamentally no more than an enumeration of the names of kami: they lack a concrete connection to the history of the age of the gods. Since the *Kojiki* describes them as “having hidden their bodies,” these kami may be construed as supreme deities, kami that retreat behind history (see ELIADE 1968). Norinaga, however, added his own unique interpretation, rereading the *musuhi no kami* as the source of all beings, existing since before the creation of heaven and earth: a single, fundamental deity from which all things are “born into the world” (*nari ideru* 成出でる). Accordingly, the values and norms that Norinaga read into the myths became legitimated as natural, each bestowed by the creator deity, *musuhi no kami*. Theories about the creation myths even today generally follow Norinaga’s identification of the *Kojiki*’s *musuhi no kami* as the fundamental source of all beings.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Norinaga developed his theory of *musuhi no kami* as a criticism of the rigid, Confucian ethics of warrior society. One must be aware that his theory is not the same as the ancient myths themselves.

As we have seen above, the text of the *Kojiki* that Norinaga constructed and valued so highly was not the *Kojiki* itself. While Norinaga continually cited a text that he called the *Kojiki* as the crux of his arguments, Norinaga’s *Kojiki* was the outcome of his *Kamiyo no masagoto*: it was a unique text that he created by mixing in variants such as the

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, SAIGŌ 1975, pp. 74–76, and MARUYAMA 1992, pp. 299–309. It was not Norinaga, however, who characterized *musuhi no kami* as the common ancestor of the Japanese people. This interpretation was forcefully presented only beginning with Hirata Atsutane (c.f. HAROOTUNIAN 1988, pp. 77–78).

alternate passages of the *Nihon shoki*. As we have already seen, Norinaga created this composite text in order to read into the myths of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* a world ordered around the basis of *mono no aware*.

The *mono no aware*-like sensitivity that Norinaga read into his constructed text had its roots in the non-ruling strata of society. While Confucian Shinto and medieval Shinto studies before Norinaga had analyzed the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths as a way of individual norms, they had attributed historical significance only to the elite political circles of the court and shogunate.<sup>9</sup> Norinaga, however, did not limit the constituency of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths to the ruling classes: he always envisioned the “imperial land” as including both “the revered and the humble”—all the people who lived in Japan, from the nobles and warriors to the common people. This close linkage of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths to the non-ruling strata does not appear before the advent of nativism: it was an epochal development.

#### *Phases of Interpretation*

Interpreters since Norinaga have traditionally devoted themselves to the establishment and compilation of a single authoritative text, the primary aim being to reconcile the discrepancies between the texts of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, as well as between the main and alternate variants within the *Nihon shoki*. Yet today, as scholars have increasingly reconsidered the interpretative history of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, it has become clear that what each commentator believed to be a recapturing of the original form of the classic texts remained in the end no more than his own personal exegesis. Indeed, as far as can be ascertained from historical documents, there was never a time when the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths constituted a single, unified text: a multitude of variants, as well as the interpretations connected with each of them, coexisted side by side.

This awareness of the distinct nature of each mythic text is related to a wider movement in interpretive studies away from the background of the text to the text itself. Each text—whether an ancient classic or a commentary upon it—has come to be seen as an expression of its own discrete worldview (KONOSHI 1986). In Norinaga’s interpretation, we have already seen that as the content read into the text changed, so too did the social position of its transmitters. Thus in Norinaga’s exposition of the Ancient Way, “the demand to restore or

<sup>9</sup> On the difference between Suika Shinto and Kokugaku, see ISOMAE and OGURA 1996.

recreate a past so remote as to have little relevance to the present may,” as E. J. HOBBSBAWM has said of invocations of antiquity elsewhere, “equate total innovation” (1972, p. 8).

It is not only the content of the texts that changes, however. The social position of the compiled texts, that is, the very relationship between the myths and human beings—from the interpreter’s point of view, the understanding of the myths; or, from the vantage of the myths themselves, the social function of the myths—is also transformed.<sup>10</sup> The distinctiveness of Norinaga’s understanding of the relationship between the myths and human beings becomes apparent when his interpretation is compared to the way in which the myths were regarded in ancient times.<sup>11</sup>

#### NORINAGA AND ANTIQUITY

For the ancient Japanese, as for Norinaga, the purpose of mythic history was to explain the establishment of the realm and the determination of its rulers. Those common themes that appear in different versions in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*—Izanagi and Izanami giving birth to the land, the descent of the imperial grandson, and the cession of the realm by Ōkuninushi—were regarded as tales of the process by which the rulers of the realm were established. On this point, the ancient understanding of the texts is no different from Norinaga’s.

Yet, in ancient times, the subjects that were legitimized by the myths—that is, the constituency of the myths—consisted not only of the imperial family, but of the entire Yamato court centered on the emperor (TSUDA 1963). The kingship myths of that time were drawn from two types of texts: the imperial household histories and the clan histories.<sup>12</sup> The imperial household histories were orthodox texts that confirmed the court itself. Like the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, they comprised a history of kingship centered on the imperial house. In contrast, clan histories such as the late eighth- or early ninth-century

<sup>10</sup> Studies attempting to clarify historical phases in the social contextualization of sacred texts have begun appearing in European and American religious studies. In these works, the treatment of sacred texts as purely doctrinal expressions of an individual’s inner state is repeatedly criticized as an approach that dehistoricizes modern individual views. Instead, they demonstrate the past relationship of sacred texts and society. See for example KOESTER 1991 and THOMAS 1993.

<sup>11</sup> The following treatment of the ancient understanding of the myths will be limited to the author’s viewpoint and previous scholarship.

<sup>12</sup> The imperial household histories (*teiki* 帝紀 and *kuji* 旧辭) are considered to have provided the main sources for the compilation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, and existed independently until the Heian period. The clan histories (*ujibumi* 氏文) still exist today. (Translator’s note.)

*Takahashi Ujibumi* 高橋氏文 and the *Kogo Shūi* 古語拾遺 (807) were handed down within each clan, and explained the history of each clan in terms of its relation to the court.

For the clans, these histories of their relationship to royal authority related the origins of their service to the kings. As the dispute in the early Heian period between the Takahashi and Azumi clans—in which each clan cited the myths to support its prior claim to the position of imperial chef—clearly demonstrates, the histories became proof of the legitimacy of contemporary offices and political positions. By linking the clan histories to the history of royal authority in the imperial household histories, the kingship myths became not merely ideal tales but writings that fulfilled the political function of placing the clans that created them within the sphere of royal authority (MIZOGUCHI 1972; ABE 1984; and UMEZAWA 1962, chapter 8, pp. 357–414).

Through the mediation of the clan writings, the constituency of the myths in ancient times was limited to clan members who were integrated according to their political functions into the Yamato court centered on the imperial house. The people who appeared in the myths were the ancestors of the clans that constituted the court. According to the clans, then, the kingship myths were literally their own. This intimate relationship between the myths and the people who comprised the court was also evident in their sense of history. Through the continued compilation of official state histories (*Rikkokushi* 六国史) until 887—of which the *Nihon shoki* was the first—the origins of the myths were brought directly down to their own time.

Thus, the people who lived in the land of Japan did not look to the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* for some portrayal of the origins of “the people” (*aohitogusa* 青人草) because, in contrast to Norinaga’s interpretation, in antiquity the common people appeared only as objects of the rule of the Yamato court. In ancient times, there existed a solemn distinction between the subject that narrated the myths and the object that was related in the myths. The kingship myths of antiquity were creations of the governing body called the court; they were not the product of the folk (TSUDA 1963, pp. 317–688). Because of their political functions, the myths were possessed exclusively by the court.

Given the situation in antiquity, it becomes even more obvious that the relationship of humans and myths in Norinaga’s thought is an apolitical ideal that lacks the restrictions of a social collectivity. This apolitical idealism and the attendant emancipation of the constituency of the myths in early modern interpretations first materialized due to the loss of real political power of the royal court centered on the imperial household.

With the rise of the political power of the military families in the medieval period, the ancient political system in which the emperor was the direct symbol of authority weakened, and by the early modern period the court had lost political power entirely. The imperial family became a traditional authority that did not hold real power (FUKUYA 1991; YASUMARU 1992); at the same time, the kingship myths lost their political function. The clan writings lost their former *raison d'être* of situating their constituencies in the political order. Indeed, the clan writings and the clans themselves virtually disappeared entirely at the beginning of the early modern period.

By this time, the dual structure of the clan writings and the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* no longer existed. Even those clan writings that serendipitously still remained had lost their original political function. They had come to be seen as mere alternative versions of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, such as the *Kogo shūi* of the Imbe clan, or even forgeries, such as the *Sendai kuji hongī* 先代旧事本紀 of the Mononobe clan. Since there was no longer any function for the clan writings to fulfill in politically linking the myths and their constituencies, the myths became apolitical and unlimited. Thus the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths as we understand them are, without the clan writings, monotonous. Our understanding was created against the background of a type of relation between humans and myths of a different order than in ancient times, one that came into existence in the early modern period.

Through this kind of process, the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* were freed from their political constraints in the early modern period to become relevant to a wide range of social classes. The constituency of the myths expanded to include all people who lived in the realm: here the unification of the subject that relates the myths and the object which is related can be seen. Yet, the actual ancestors of the new constituency do not appear—there is nothing like the clan writings that links the population of Japan as a whole concretely to the myths. The only entity directly connected to the myths is the imperial house. Norinaga's interpretation, which found the right to govern Japan only in the emperor as explained in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, arose under these conditions.

Compared to the ancient period, a gap opened up in the early modern period between the myths and their constituency. Because of this discontinuity, the liberation of the class of the constituency became possible. The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths did not directly explain the history of the people of the non-ruling classes. However, in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the creation of the land where they lived

was explained, and they actually lived their daily lives in that land: it was possible for the people of the non-ruling classes to be linked to the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths, if only as the object of governance. Because by now the myths did not contain any direct referent, anyone could take part in them simply by living in Japan.

It was the publishing technology created in the Kan'ei period (1624–1644) that effectively linked the myths and the people of the non-ruling classes. Before that time, the dissemination of written texts had been largely constrained by the technological limitations of hand-copying and block printing. With the establishment of woodblock printing, large-scale production of written texts became possible (KAWASE 1967; *Tamakatsuma, Norinaga zenshū* 1, p. 43). From 1644 (Kan'ei 21) the *Kojiki*, then from 1667 (Kanbun 7) the *Nihon shoki* were printed repeatedly, and innumerable versions of commentaries on them circulated in the towns (see *Hoteiban kokusho sōmokuroku* 補訂版国書総目録, vol. 3, pp. 388–90, and vol. 6, p. 425). Concerning the changes brought about by this large scale production of written texts, KONTA Yōzō concludes:

The printing establishments that sprang up during the Edo period published all of the notable products of the spiritual movements of the Japanese people that had been amassed as hand copies since the ancient period.... The classics of aristocratic society began to affect the classics of the Japanese folk. One could call this the liberation of the classics.... Anyone who wanted to could become familiar with the classics, and the social and geographic expansion of cultural reception proceeded on an unprecedented scale. (1977, p. i)

Together with the establishment of book lenders (*kashihon'ya* 貸本屋), the large-scale production of written texts made it possible for anyone to take the *Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki* in his own hands and read it. With the presence of these two elements—the establishment of printing technology and the loss of the prescriptive political power of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*—even if an individual did not belong to a particular group such as the court or a Shinto religious association, he could freely read the *Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki* and their commentaries.

Norinaga disparaged the limited nature of the hand-copied texts and closely guarded thought of his time. “Secret transmissions and the like,” he wrote, “truly [embody] the dirty, selfish feeling of holding something for oneself without revealing it to other people, yet bragging of it to the world at large” (*Tamakatsuma*, p. 284). The national characteristics of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that came to be seen as self-evident in the modern period were first established only with the

spread of printed texts and the loss of the prescriptive power of the classics. We must fully recognize that our understanding of the myths as essentially apolitical and unlimited was a product of Norinaga and later. Based on these premises, the people of the non-ruling classes, who had newly become the reading audience of the myths, read the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as tales of feeling and emotion using the *mono no aware*-like sentimentality that was their cultural peculiarity.

#### TOWARD THE MODERN

By not taking as its premise membership in a closed group, but instead establishing a more open relationship between humans and myth, Norinaga's interpretation opened up the horizons of modern interpretation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. During the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate, at about the same time that people began to understand the emperor system in political terms, nativism permeated more deeply among the non-ruling classes. No longer the domain of regional intellectuals alone, nativism set down roots in the daily lives of area communities. Prepared by the thought of Hirata Atsutane, nativism had become a grass-roots phenomenon by the *bakumatsu* period.

However, as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths were taken up amidst "the management of actual life and society in the countryside" (MATSUMOTO 1971, p. 634), and their interpretation became systematized and habitualized, there was no more freedom for philosophical theories of the myths such as Norinaga's problematization of subjective consciousness. Although Norinaga was a person of the non-ruling classes, he was still an intellectual, and thus different from people strongly rooted in local communities. In denying the stability of feelings and criticizing actions undertaken on the basis of such supposedly unchanging sentiments, Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware* problematized the depths of emotion.

More than anything else, his theory came into being in a relationship of tension with the Confucian studies that at that time dominated social ethics. According to Norinaga, "There is a limit to all human knowledge. Since the principle of sincerity cannot be understood intellectually, one should not recklessly assess and comment upon matters related to the gods" (*Kojiki den, Norinaga zenshū* 9, p. 126). Thus reality cannot be measured by human reason, and value judgments of reality are criticized as actions that exceed human authority. Furthermore, attacking the Tokugawa Confucian overconfidence in human reason, Norinaga asserted that "Overcoming emotions' is no great thing. It is insincere to act as if one can intellectually know the



pathos (*aware*) of all things” (*Genji monogatari tama no ogushi*, p. 207). Yet at the same time, Norinaga warned against being swept away by the content of one’s own emotions. Whether in Confucian studies or in *mono no aware*-like feelings, Norinaga refused to either attribute substantiveness to material objects or give them unilateral legitimation (MARUYAMA 1952, p. 270).

This mental attitude, common as well among religious masters, was actually not something that just anyone could do: one could say that it was even unconnected to the daily lives of normal people. As the interpretation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* became incorporated in the daily life of the people, however, it gave social legitimation to their opinions and brought with it a dogmatization of interpretation. MATSUMOTO Sannosuke has summarized the peculiarities of this domesticated nativist thought as “diligence in one’s household occupation, prohibition of abortion, respect for social distinctions, warning against luxury, the way of husband and wife, the education of children, prenatal care, the rules of the neighborhood group (*goningumi* 五人組), respect for village elders, prohibition of meat-eating, and the like” (1971, p. 642). As an understanding derived from the standard of an individual’s lifestyle, this was an extension beyond Norinaga. No longer can there be seen a relationship of tension with an opposing philosophy: Norinaga’s interpretation has been unilaterally actualized as a principle that supports the ethics of everyday life. In place of the Confucian studies that had enveloped society before, the opinions of educated peasants and other students of nativism were systematized as the governing concepts of their society.

In this respect, the nativist interpretation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that, after Hirata Atsutane, became embedded in everyday life, retreated significantly from Norinaga’s criticism of consciousness. Likewise, the way in which we unilaterally read our emotions into the myths—understanding mythology as novels of private lives (“I-novelized myths”)—has remained constant in substantive interpretations of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* since Hirata nativism. Our novelized interpretation of the mythic tales has thus retreated from the critical stance of Norinaga.<sup>13</sup>

Yet at the same time, what made it possible to link people rooted in local communities to the emperor system and myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* was in fact the liberation of the myths established in Norinaga’s interpretation. Once achieved, this liberation has not disap-

<sup>13</sup> In recent years, UMEHARA Takeshi’s *Yamato Takeru* (1986) has received much attention. It was staged as a kabuki play by Ichikawa Ennosuke, and was made into a popular cartoon by Yamagishi Ryōko.

peared. Instead, the myths have been used assertively to attract the people of the non-ruling classes—recreated in the modern period as national subjects—to the imperial state.<sup>14</sup> From the late Tokugawa into the Meiji period, anthologies of Norinaga’s annotations were repeatedly edited and published. Yet, while this shows that many people at the time were interested in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, it also demonstrates that their understanding was superficial, simply swallowing whole the conclusions of Norinaga’s interpretive commentaries.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Authority of the Original Past*

In the end, Norinaga’s greatest achievement in the history of the interpretation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* can be found in his adaptation of the traditions of the ruling class according to the norms of the non-ruling classes. TSUDA Sōkichi says: “Human nature...although it always existed, had been constrained by literary knowledge and Chinese thought, and had therefore not been clarified theoretically. But little by little, human nature emerged. When we speak of the distinctive accomplishment of the intellectual world of the nativists, we refer primarily to this point [the formulation of a coherent theory of human nature]” (1977, p. 161). *Mono no aware*, based in the culture of the non-ruling classes, had before Norinaga always remained in the realm of everyday impressions. It had not been granted the social legitimacy that would enable it to oppose the rationalism of Confucianism. Under these circumstances, Norinaga referred to the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that were the basis of the historical legitimacy of the ruling classes, and read into them his own worldview.

The Chinese historian J. B. HENDERSON has written that “Commentary dominated much of the intellectual life of postclassical, premodern man not only by virtue of its importance as a genre or form, but also through the habits of mind and modes of thought it fostered” (1991, p. 81). Indeed, much like Norinaga used the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, people in the premodern societies of both East and West have frequently chosen the traditional classics of their societies as the site for the development of their own philosophy. By taking part in a site that has been granted social authority, it became possible for the

<sup>14</sup> Since this essay focuses on a comparison of Norinaga and the ancient period, I would like to refer readers to the works of MIYACHI (1991) and YASUMARU (1992) on emperor system ideology from the *bakumatsu* to the Meiji period.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Kurita Hijimaro’s 栗田土満 *Shindaiki ashikabi* 神代紀草牙 (1810 [Bunka 8]); Murakami Tadanori’s 村上忠順 *Murakami Tadanori Kojiki hyōchū* 村上忠順古事記標注 (1874 [Meiji 7]); Mikuni Yūmin’s 三國幽民 *Kokun kojiki* 古訓古事記 (1875 [Meiji 8]).

worldview of the non-ruling classes to defend its social base against the ruling classes.

This appears in a straightforward form in Norinaga's stylistic assessments. For instance, Norinaga asserted that the *Kojiki* was older than the *Nihon shoki* because it was written in a mixture of Japanese and Chinese (*Kamiyo no masagoto*, pp. 487–89). Today, scholars dispute the validity of Norinaga's position based on such grounds as the chronological precedence of classical Chinese over phonetic representation and the relationship of orality and writing (KOTANI 1986). However, to reduce this problem to the objective dimension alone misses the point. The Chinese style of the *Nihon shoki* was the symbol of the Chinese educationalism of the ruling classes represented by Confucian studies. Moreover, classical Chinese was not conducive to the emotional expression that Norinaga desired. By designating the *Kojiki* as the essential tradition of Japan, Norinaga denied the cultural traditions of the ruling classes who comprised the constituency of the *Nihon shoki* as historically extraneous. In doing so, he succeeded in asserting the legitimacy of his own worldview.

However, the attempt to adopt the basis of the arguments of the ruling class in order to prove the legitimacy of the non-ruling classes necessarily required constricting the feelings of the non-ruling classes within the imperial tradition represented in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. In order to project into a text the worldview of a new constituency through his commentary, the interpreter cannot be conscious of what he reads into it as his own voluntary act: he understands it as a reclamation of tradition. Thus the worldview of the interpreter becomes united with the narrative of the classic myths, so that the emperor system becomes the fundamental source of the interpreter's cultural world.

Because throughout the Tokugawa era the emperor lacked political power, references to the myths by Norinaga and others remained only on the level of culture: the political importance of Norinaga's praise of the classic myths was not yet clear. Yet, when in the modern period the emperor system was once again politicized and systematized, the emperor system as a cultural source reflected in the interpreters' worldview merged with the emperor system as a symbol of political authority. The cultural character of the former concealed the authoritative character of the latter.

This can be seen in striking form in the modern period in the understanding of the emperor system as a "cultural community" among such liberal intellectuals as WATSUJI Tetsurō (1962) and TSUDA Sōkichi (1978). In the modern period, when the imperial house was

redefined as the symbol of state authority, it could no longer continue as the apparatus of selflessness that it had been for Norinaga. The submission to the emperor espoused by modern intellectuals as a symbol of cultural tradition was institutionalized and transformed into submission to the authority of the modern state. Thus, Norinaga's rereading of the myths according to the non-ruling classes in the end conceptually tied this new constituency to the base of the imperial state as Japanese subjects.

#### TOWARD AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF PERSPECTIVES

The practice of seeking a relationship to an original past in order to legitimize one's own worldview can be found from undeveloped to modern societies. An original past, as something that provides "an ideological foundation capable of guaranteeing the existence of man and of the universe, its stability and its permanence" (PETTAZZONI 1967, p. 29; cf. GROSS 1992, pp. 8-19), confers the authenticity of historical origins upon the content that is explained. However, the myths cannot continue to be relevant under new circumstances without a process of rereading that responds to the character of the subjects and changing constituencies they define, thereby reinterpreting both the compilation of the mythic texts and the relation of humans to the myths. Indeed, it has already become impossible to believe that one's own interpretation is a reclaiming of the fundamental myths.

When one looks back upon the history of the interpretation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* from this standpoint, one notices that the interpreters all fall into a search for an original past. Such an un-selfconscious orientation toward an original past suppresses the contemporaneity of our interpretation; it has come to conceal the dogmatism inherent in defining an object by our own gaze. As long as we continue to seek cultural unity in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, we cannot deny the possibility that, depending on the circumstances, we may once again be politically captured by the emperor system. In contrast, today a movement is occurring to reduce the history of the interpretation of the classics to the worldviews that have been read into them. This is effective as criticism of belief in old legends, but if it simply begins and ends on the level of the study of worldviews, losing sight of the unique importance of research into the history of interpretations of the myths, there is a danger that it will be dissolved in the general field of intellectual history. Here lies a revival of historical relativism that simply pairs different worldviews with the passing of the ages.

The significance of the study of the interpretative history of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* per se lies in its ability to examine the funda-

mental orientations of understanding subjects. That is, despite their different worldviews, why have people consistently turned for proof to the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*? Especially now, we must examine that basic orientation toward an original past. Intellectual history that is simply an understanding of the object—no matter how well grounded in theories popular at the time—will always bring forth new myths from the horizon of the rationality of that age. What is needed now is a study of how interpreters attempt to understand the myths in close relation to themselves: a meta-intellectual history of perspectives.

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