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## Ethnicity, Sagehood, and the Politics of Literacy in Asuka Japan

This article explores the relationship between the importation of Chinese historical and divinatory texts during Japan's Asuka period (552–645) and the contemporaneous development of notions of sagehood and sage kingship. The article argues that the rapid diffusion of these texts led to the emergence of a body of literate individuals from mainly immigrant kinship groups with unrivalled levels of control over and access to the Chinese textual tradition. As Chinese divinatory and political tropes came to pervade political discourse of the period, the court's hermeneutic dependence upon these figures for the interpretation of portents had far-reaching consequences for the conception and representation of kingship during the period. By focusing upon a cluster of immigrant kinship groups associated with the early cult of Prince Shōtoku, this article demonstrates how these groups utilized their own ancestral legends to initiate a radical redefinition of imperial authority and lineage.

KEYWORDS: sagehood – sage king – Shōtoku Taishi – Asuka period – dharma king – *sakashihito*

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IN 513, THREE SCHOLARS from the Korean kingdom of Paekche arrived in the Japanese islands for the purpose of promoting literacy and knowledge of the Chinese classics. This date has been given little notice in histories of early Japanese thought and religion, although it is arguably of equal importance to the transmission of Buddhist icons and scriptures that commenced shortly thereafter. This group of scholars represented the first concerted attempt to spread the Chinese textual tradition in Yamato. Until the destruction of Paekche in 663, teachers of the Chinese classics and Buddhist monks from the three Korean kingdoms were a continuous presence in Yamato; as a result, the narrative structures and tropes of Chinese historical narratives soon became central elements in the political discourse of the Yamato court elite.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Nihon shoki*, the figure most closely associated with the advent of the Chinese textual tradition was Prince Shōtoku. Virtually alone among figures for this period, he is singled out as having studied under tutors from the Korean peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Shōtoku's biography in the text states that he was well versed in both Buddhist scriptures and in the Chinese classics; sage wisdom was matched by mastery of the textual tradition inspired by Chinese sage kings:

He was able to speak from birth and he had the wisdom of a sage. When he grew up he could hear the suits of ten people at once and evaluate them without error. He was able to know the future in advance. Further, he learned the inner [Buddhist] teachings from the Koguryō monk Hye-cha and the outer classics from the learned scholar Hak-ka. In both areas he attained equal mastery. (NSK Suiko 1.4.10, NKBZ 2, p. 531; ASTON 2, p. 122)

1. Although starting from an extremely low base, the diffusion of literacy in Yamato was surprisingly rapid. PIGGOTT notes that recent archeological discoveries indicate that literacy and Chinese learning had spread to even comparatively remote regions by the middle of the seventh century (1997, pp. 152–55). Note also that throughout this essay I shall use the term “Yamato” to designate the region controlled by rulers situated in the Yamato plain of Honshu. I do this in order to emphasize the fact that the conception of a ruler of the entire Japanese islands was not a cultural “given” but rather an ideological construct in the making.

2. The *Nihon shoki* (NSK) does contain an almost certainly spurious entry stating that one Prince Uji studied the Five Classics under the Paekche scholar Wani during Ōjin's reign. Although translations of the NSK and all other quoted texts are my own, several differ only stylistically from ASTON's translation (the edition used is divided into two volumes, hence the designation ASTON 1 and 2). Throughout I shall therefore give the date for each citation from the NSK (the year of the particular reign, the month, and the day when available), followed by citations for the *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (henceforth NKBZ) and ASTON.

This connection between sagehood and Chinese learning is reiterated in the *Nihon shoki* account of Shōtoku's death, where Shōtoku is again presented as a paragon of continental learning:

At this time the Koguryō monk Hye-cha heard of the death of the Crown Prince Kamitsumiya and he grieved greatly. He therefore held a feast for Buddhist monks in honor of the Prince. On the day when he personally expounded upon the scriptures, he made a vow, saying: "In the land of Yamato there was a sage known as the Prince Kamitsumiya no Toyotomimi. Born in the land of Yamato, he was truly blessed by heaven with the virtues of a sage. Having penetrated the depths of the three sage founders he continued the plans of the former sages. He revered the Three Treasures and saved the people from distress. He was truly a great sage. Now the Prince has died. Although I am from a different land, in my heart I was closely bound to him. Now that I am alone, what benefit is there in living? [Therefore] next year, on the fifth day of the second month, I will certainly die. In this way we shall meet in the Pure Land and together work for the salvation of all sentient beings." Now on the [foretold] day Hye-cha died. At this people said to one another "Prince Kamitsumiya was not the only sage. Hye-cha was also a sage."<sup>3</sup>

Although Shōtoku is thought of today primarily in the context of the development of the Japanese Buddhist tradition, these passages suggest an eclectic mix of Buddhist and Confucian models of sagehood was used to construct the figure of the paradigmatic sage prince. Here the Buddhist monk Hye-cha lauds Shōtoku for continuing the work of Chinese sage kings even as he declares that Shōtoku has been reborn in the Pure Land. Shōtoku's biography, similarly, states that he had mastered both Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings. Perhaps even more striking, however, is the emphasis each passage places upon divination and the ability to foretell the future. Virtue, wisdom, and divine favor in early Yamato were all manifested and confirmed through supernatural omens. For that reason, all would-be sages or sage kings in early Yamato paid close attention to the arts of divination.

One further, equally striking aspect of these passages is their emphasis on Shōtoku's close relationship with his teacher, the Sage Counselor Hye-cha. Both do far more than simply present Shōtoku as a sage possessed of superhuman abilities of perception, intellect and cultural/religious acumen. Rather, each text seems specifically designed to highlight Shōtoku's spiritual connec-

3. NSK Suiko 29.2.5, NKBZ 2, pp. 577–49, ASTON 2, pp. 148–49. Throughout the rest of this essay I will bracket issues regarding what this prince "really" believed, understood, etc. In order to clarify the distinction between the figure of history and legend, I shall use the term "Kamitsumiya" only to refer to the actual historical prince that lived during Suiko's reign. The term "Shōtoku" will only be used in reference to the constructed cultural icon that became the object of reverence for later generations.

tion with the Koguryō monk. In both texts the sagehood of the Yamato Prince is inextricably bound up with the status of his teacher from across the sea; indeed, the ties that bind them are shown to be stronger than even death itself.

This essay will explore the role of ethnicity and hermeneutic authority in the formation of the conceptions of the sage king (*hijiri no kimi* 聖王) and the sage counselor (*sakashihito* 賢人或賢) in seventh century Yamato. I will focus on the role of a cluster of immigrant kinship groups associated with the early Shōtoku cult in the dissemination of Chinese historical and divinatory texts over which they claimed unrivalled mastery.<sup>4</sup>

Underlying this project will be two premises concerning the conception and exercise of power. The first of these is derived from Foucault's dictum that embedded within every system of power is a system of knowledge which both organizes and makes meaningful the formation and use of that power. In what follows I propose to examine how the introduction of a system of knowledge—in this case the Chinese classics—produced a host of unforeseen cultic and political consequences at the Yamato court. We shall see that in the process the immigrant kinship groups at the heart of the early Shōtoku cult helped initiate a radical redefinition of imperial authority and, ultimately, the imperial house itself.<sup>5</sup>

The second premise underlying this project stems from the assumption that the primary significance of the introduction of the Chinese textual tradition was not necessarily located within the texts themselves. In what follows I will focus instead on the power relations engendered by the dependence of the Yamato court elite upon immigrant kinship groups with vastly superior levels of control over and access to the Chinese textual tradition. Once we adopt this focus it becomes possible to see how issues of textual and political authority in the period were entangled with issues of ethnicity, as immigrant kinship groups served as gatekeepers and custodians of the continental textual tradition and the political/cultural manifestations that it engendered.

### *Whose Shōtoku Cult?*

For the purposes of this essay, in speaking of the nascent Shōtoku cult I will restrict my focus to a small number of kinship groups that cooperated in rites undertaken at Shitennō-ji, the first temple said to have been founded by the

4. The concept of “immigrant” is of course culturally constructed. Throughout this essay I shall use the term “immigrant kinship group” to refer to any kinship group that claimed as a founding ancestor a figure that arrived in the Japanese islands from across the sea.

5. PIGGOTT has argued against rendering the term *tennō* as “emperor,” a term that she argues carries connotations of “martial political formation” which, though suitable for Chinese conceptions of rulership, are stronger than the Japanese case would warrant (1997, p.8). I have retained this usage in this essay, however, in instances in which Japanese rulers are represented in terms of Chinese models of sage kingship. For stylistic reasons I have also retained the adjective “imperial.”

Yamato Prince. Among the most important of these were the Abe, one of the most prominent kinship groups of the period, as well as a cluster of kinship groups that traced their ancestry to the Korean kingdom of Silla. Three of the most important of these immigrant kinship groups—the Kishi, the Kusakabe and the Miyake—frequently intermarried and cooperated closely at cultic centers across the Japanese islands. By the early eighth century relations between these kinship groups and the Abe were so close that all claimed descent from the founding ancestor of the Abe lineage (ŌHASHI 1996, pp. 199–204). I shall also make repeated reference to the Hata, yet another immigrant kinship group from the Korean kingdom of Silla that cooperated culturally with each of the above mentioned kinship groups.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to their association with Shitennō-ji, there are several further reasons for emphasizing the role of these kinship groups in the construction of both the Shōtoku cult and early conceptions of sage kingship. One of the most important of these involves the prominence of these kinship groups at court in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. One major reason for this prominence was the support given by these kinship groups to the cause of the victorious ruler Tenmu in the civil war that swept him to power in 670. Further influence was also derived from the fact that one of these kinship groups—the Kusakabe Kishi—appears to have played a central role in raising the Prince Kusakabe, Tenmu's crown prince and eldest son (ŌHASHI 1996, pp. 199–207). Although Prince Kusakabe died before assuming the throne, his wife, children and grandchildren served as rulers for most of the Nara period. As a result, throughout the late seventh and eighth centuries these kinship groups were extremely well placed to influence the formation of conceptions of sage kingship at court.

One example of how prominence at court could be translated into direct influence over ideological matters can be seen in the role played by these kinship groups in the composition of the *Nihon shoki*. Evidence of the involvement of these kinship groups in this process can be seen in the *Shoku nihongi*, which states that in 714 the ruler Genmyō appointed a member of the Miyake to serve as co-editor of the project (*Shoku nihongi*, vol.1, p. 55). As Genmyō, the chief consort of Prince Kusakabe, was also apparently raised by the Abe, this cluster of kinship groups appears to have played a substantial role in determining the direction of both the early Shōtoku legend corpus and the ancestral legends of the imperial house itself.<sup>7</sup> Below we shall see that these kinship groups used this

6. In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in the Hata, perhaps the largest and most influential immigrant kinship group of the period. Classic works on the Hata include KATO 1998, HINO 1982, pp. 225–359, and HIRANO 1961, pp. 25–47.

7. Prior to her accession, Genmyō is referred to as the “Imperial Princess Abe” in NSK Tenmu 4.2. 13, NKBZ 3, p. 359. ASTON 2, p. 327. This title was used in reference to Genmyō even in the Chinese histories. See TSUNODA 1951, p. 52.

position to highlight the cults and legends of their own ancestors in legends that also asserted the sage virtue of imperial ancestors.

### *Governance and the Diffusion of Textuality*

The prominence of these kinship groups in the composition and editing of the *Nihon shoki* in turn reflected a longstanding dominance by immigrant kinship groups in virtually all matters related to literacy and the continental textual tradition. This linkage between ethnic affiliation and literacy was even more pronounced during Kamitsumiya's lifetime, when Buddhist priests from Paekche served as tutors and counselors for students that were drawn in large part from a pool of immigrant kinship group families. The effects of this process, however, soon transformed the mechanics of governance in early Yamato; by the time Tenmu assumed the throne in 670, a full-blown bureaucratic structure was possible in which officials from regions throughout Japan could communicate in writing and routinely record administrative tasks and expenditures.<sup>8</sup>

The influence of immigrant kinship groups did not stop, however, with the simple mechanics of administration; they also changed the fundamental premises by which the exercise of political power was made possible and in terms of which it was understood. One of the most important ways in which they did so was through the introduction of continental forms of ritual and divination. These are attributed in the *Nihon shoki* to the monk Kwan-leuk, who was noted mainly for having introduced to the court continental techniques of astrology and magic:

The Paekche priest Kwan-leuk arrived and presented [as tribute] books on calendar-making, astronomy and geography as well as books on invisibility and other divinatory arts. At this time three or four students were chosen to study with Kwan-leuk.... All studied until they had attained proficiency.

(NSK, Suiko 10.10, NKBZ 2, p. 539, ASTON 2, p. 126)

This interest in continental divinatory texts and techniques continued throughout the pre-modern period. Even during Kamitsumiya's lifetime these techniques appear to have occupied a position of paramount importance within the Buddhist clergy; Kwan-leuk, for example, was named as the first head of the Buddhist clergy of Yamato (NSK, Suiko 32.4.17, NKBZ 2, p. 586).

### *Sages and the Sun*

The Yamato court's interest in continental techniques of calendar making and astronomy was doubtless fueled in great part by conceptions of sage kingship in

8. For by far the best treatment of the development of governmental structures in the Tenmu era see PIGGOTT 1997, pp. 127–67. Piggott also argues that provincial governors functioned primarily as ritualists sent out by the court to extend the literate culture of the capital to provincial elites.

Yamato that existed prior to the widespread diffusion of the Chinese textual tradition. During Kamitsumiya's lifetime Yamato rulers appear to have derived much of their authority from claims to a special relationship with the sun. This can be seen, ironically, from accounts in Chinese court histories recording sporadic contacts between the Chinese and Yamato. The *Sui shu*, a Chinese court history which summarizes accounts of diplomatic missions between the Yamato court and the Sui dynasty during the reign of Empress Suiko, offers particularly valuable insights into the Yamato court as it existed during Kamitsumiya's lifetime. The text's account of the first Yamato mission to the Sui reports:

The envoy said that the Yamato king views Heaven as his older brother and the sun as his younger brother. Before dawn, [the Yamato king] holds court while sitting cross-legged. When the sun rises, he ceases governmental affairs, saying that he leaves things in charge of his younger brother the sun.

(*Sui shu* 6, p. 1827)

This connection between Yamato rulers and the sun appears to have translated etymologically into the reading that the Japanese gave to the Chinese character for sage: *hijiri*. The earliest verifiable use of the term uses the characters for "sun" (*hi* 日) and "to know" (*shiru* 知) (PIGGOTT 1997, pp. 158–61). This second character, in addition to the sense of "to know" also carried the meaning of "to master" or "to govern." Thus from a very early date kingship and sage wisdom in Yamato appear to have been linked with the sun.

Set against this horizon of reception, Kwan-leuk's introduction of Chinese astronomical and calendar making techniques was important for two reasons: first, it helped produce a revolution in the cosmological and political beliefs prevalent in Yamato. Perhaps even more importantly, it also led to the creation of a restricted group of practitioners with competence in these techniques. This in turn helped create a class of intellectuals with unchallenged control over a body of knowledge that was widely acknowledged to be crucial for the exercise of power.

### *Promises and Pitfalls for the Sage King*

The adoption of Chinese conceptions of sage kingship and divination offered two important advantages for Yamato rulers seeking to expand the range of their authority. The cosmological and divinatory techniques entering Yamato at this time presumed a highly centralized governmental structure centered on the person of the Son of Heaven. The conceptual framework of the sage king thus facilitated the creation of political ties between ruler and minister based upon conceptions of loyalty and deference that transcended kinship and regional limitations. Second, continental divination techniques promised not only accurate prediction of future events; they also served as a vehicle for pro-

claiming Heaven's favor with rulers of great virtue.<sup>9</sup> In effect, the Chinese textual tradition allowed Yamato rulers to lay claim to a new type of cosmic sanction that could be verified for all to see.

There was along with this, however, one significant danger for any Yamato ruler claiming the status of sage ruler—by relying upon propitious omens and placing the virtue of the ruler at the center of political discourse, Yamato rulers also opened themselves up to potential critique. The concept of the sage king rested on the belief that Heaven would favor a ruler of great virtue and wisdom. This differed in a fundamental way from later claims of imperial divinity; Heaven's favor could be lost if the ruler failed to attend to the duties of state. In China such critiques served as one of the main checks on the Son of Heaven's power; indeed, the authority to make such critiques was the *quid pro quo* extracted by Chinese intellectuals for supporting would-be rulers. With the adoption of this intellectual framework in Yamato, the hermeneutics of divination soon became an important arena for the contestation of power. No faction that aimed to seize power could ignore the political uses of omens and divination, nor could they neglect the textual tradition and intellectuals with whom authority for interpreting omens rested.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Divination and the Hermeneutics of Power*

This was made abundantly clear shortly after the arrival of Kwan-leuk at the court of Suiko. This period marks the beginning of an explosion of entries in the *Nihon shoki* recording omens portending political disaster (TAMURA 1984, pp. 419–41). As Kwan-leuk took up residence in Asuka-dera, the kinship group temple of the Soga, Tamura has argued that the Soga used Kwan-leuk's divinatory knowledge as a political tool with which to criticize Empress Suiko.

Tamura further argues that Suiko's successor Jōmei eventually broke the Soga monopoly on divination by turning to the monk Bin for assistance in recording and interpreting omens. Bin, a member of an immigrant kinship group claiming Chinese descent, had been sent by Jōmei to T'ang China for study as a scholar-monk. Upon his return he was accorded enormous deference by Jōmei and his successors, whom Bin rewarded with favorable interpretations of omens. The prominence of figures such as Kwan-leuk and Bin thus suggests the rise of a new type of intellectual in Yamato with the hermeneutic authority

9. Thus we have in the *Nihon shoki* legends of rulers such as Kōgyoku and Yūroku receiving auspicious responses to their petitions to Heaven to the accompaniment of cries of "A ruler of great virtue!" from the people. See NSK Yūroku 4.2, NKBZ 2, p. 161; ASTON 1, p. 342 and Kōgyoku 1.8.1, NKBZ 3, p. 65; ASTON 2, p. 175.

10. Thus sage kingship was not sacred kingship. For the emergence of notions of imperial divinity, see PIGGOTT 1997, pp. 155–61.



not only to interpret omens but also, in effect, to pass judgement on the ruler himself (TAMURA 1984, pp. 419–41).

Throughout the rest of the century and beyond Yamato rulers took a keen interest in the discovery and interpretation of omens—over fifty such omens are listed in the *Nihon shoki* alone for the period dating to the reign of Empress Jitō.<sup>11</sup> Below we shall see that several of these entries are intimately connected with the Silla immigrant kinship groups that helped create the early Shōtoku cult.

### *Divination and Chinese Rulership*

In fashioning a new role for themselves as keepers of the Chinese textual tradition, immigrant kinship groups built upon pre-existing models that were rooted in Chinese political and hermeneutical traditions. From at least the Han dynasty onwards the “discovery” of omens portending the waxing or waning of dynastic lineages was an essential element in the authentication of any ruler. Howard Wechsler notes:

By Han times there arose a belief that Heaven not only could grant or revoke a Mandate to rule, but also constantly supervised a ruler’s administration by means of its power to reveal auspicious or calamitous omens. Heaven-sent anomalies of nature—comets, eclipses, droughts, floods, earthquakes, and the like—were especially intended to warn the ruler that he was in danger of losing the Mandate.... According to the doctrines of *t’ien-ming* and of Heaven sent portents, there was a mutual interaction between Heaven and man, especially between Heaven and ruler. Such doctrines gave rise, during Han times and afterward, to incessant and vocal warnings by counselors that rulers had to practice virtue and avoid idleness...all would-be dynastic founders and insecure rulers searched hungrily for any phenomena that could be interpreted as signs that they indeed were the rightful occupiers of the throne.

(WECHSLER 1985, pp. 13–14)

The importance of divination in the Chinese political process if anything intensified during the centuries following the Han as the Buddhist ideal of the dharma king augmented Confucian notions of the sage king who rules with the mandate of Heaven. Propitious omens were used to demonstrate not only the virtue of the Son of Heaven but also the vast karmic merit accumulated by the ruler both during his reign and in former lives. By the Sui dynasty rulers were no longer content to simply wait for the appearance of auspicious omens. Sui Yang-ti, for instance, had himself proclaimed a “bodhisattva emperor” and then organized a nationwide search for stupas and relics from the Buddhist Dharma King Aśoka. Omens continued to play an important role in the contes-

11. For a list of such omens, see TAMURA 1984, pp. 420–22.

tation of power throughout the period; the end of the Sui dynasty and subsequent rise of the T'ang was marked by multiple claims of auspicious omens on the part of both the Sui and T'ang (WECHSLER 1985, pp. 55–78).

Because envoys and exchange students from Yamato visited the Sui court at this time, it is virtually certain that the Yamato court was aware of Sui Yang-ti's program.<sup>12</sup> It was not long before omens of sage rulership were being offered to Yamato rulers from far-flung reaches of the realm. How these omens functioned in the religious and political theater of the Yamato court becomes clear once we ask who offered such omens and who interpreted them.

### *The Hakuji and the Early Shōtoku Cult*

The most dramatic illustration of the importance of the role of omens in court politics can be found in the fifth year of the Taika era (650), less than thirty years after the death of Prince Kamitsumiya and barely twenty years after the establishment of the T'ang dynasty. In the second month of that year a white pheasant, or *hakuji* 白雉, was presented to the court of the ruler Kōtoku by Kusakabe Muraji Shikibu, an official in Anato in southern Honshu (NSK Hakuji 1.2.1, NKBZ 3, p. 181.)

The fact that this bird was offered to the court by a member of the Kusakabe kinship group suggests that kinship groups associated with the early Shōtoku cult were involved in constructing this new ideological pillar for Yamato rulers. As we saw above, the Kusakabe were a prominent kinship group based in Naniwa with close affiliations with Shitennō-ji and with such kinship groups as the Abe, Hata, Kishi, and Miyake. Such affiliations are crucial for understanding this event because Kōtoku's reign was also an early peak in the power of the Abe and these same immigrant kinship groups; Kōtoku's Minister of the Left—the highest post in the land—was Abe no Uchimaro. Uchimaro was also the father of Kōtoku's chief consort and the maternal grandfather of the crown prince. These connections between Kōtoku and the Naniwa kinship groups seem to have been bolstered by Kusakabe Muraji Shikibu's presentation of the *hakuji*; the following year Kōtoku moved his capital to Naniwa, where Uchimaro had already led a ceremony installing a set of Buddhist images at Shitennō-ji (NSK Taika 4.2.8. NKBZ 3, p. 171). Thus the presentation of omens of sage rulership appears to have emerged at the heart of political discourse just as the Abe and their affiliated immigrant kinship groups hit their first peak of power.<sup>13</sup>

12. Further evidence for this can be seen from the fact that the letter sent by the Yamato court along with the first Yamato mission to Sui China addressed Sui Yang-ti as "Bodhisattva Emperor." This incident is discussed in KANEKO 1992, pp. 28–33. I will refer to this incident again below.

13. The Abe were never able to challenge Prince Naka no Ōe (later Emperor Tenji) for complete control at court. Nonetheless the importance of the move to Naniwa for the Abe and Kōtoku can be seen from the fact that in 653 Tenji left Naniwa for the Asuka area of Yamato, taking most of the court with him in the process. The fact that Tenji felt he needed to take such an unusual step indicates that Naniwa was not a conducive base for him.

*The Interpretation of the Omen*

How the presentation of the *hakuji* affected the political and religious discourses of the day can be seen from the omen's reception and interpretation. Confronted with the anomalous omen, the court asked the opinion of dignitaries from Paekche, members of the ecclesial bureaucracy, foreign dignitaries and the priest Bin for help in interpreting its meaning. Each of these groups referred to historical precedents for the appearance of such an omen in the dynastic records of Koguryō and China. The final word appears to have belonged to Bin, who was unequivocal about the omen's true meaning:

This is termed an auspicious omen and there is sufficient [justification] to treat it as a rare object. I have heard that when a ruler's influence flows throughout the four quarters, then white pheasants will be seen.... When a ruler is a humane sage, then they will also appear. During the time of Chou Cheng-wang, a family from Yueh-shang offered a white pheasant as tribute.... Also, in the first year of the Hsien-ning era during the reign of Chin Wu-ti, one was seen in Sung-tze. Thus this is an auspicious omen. A general amnesty should be granted.

(NSK Hakuji 1.2.1, NKBZ 3, pp. 182–83; ASTON, 2, p. 237)

In order to mark this great event, the name of the reign year was changed to Hakuji and a rite proclaiming the divine sanction for the sage ruler of Yamato was performed in the capital. After the entire court turned out for a procession of senior ministers and princes bearing a palanquin carrying the bird to the Vermilion Gate at the palace, a senior minister offered the following congratulatory address:

Because Your Majesty governs the realm with pure and serene virtue, a white pheasant has come out of the West. This is a sign that Your Majesty will continue for a thousand autumns and ten thousand years to peacefully govern the Great Land of Eight Islands of the four quarters. It is the wish of your Ministers, officials and the people that they may serve [you] with the utmost zeal and loyalty. (NSK Hakuji 1.2.15, NKBZ 3, pp. 184–85; ASTON 2, p. 238)

Lest anyone fail to get the point of the ceremony, the *Nihon shoki* recounts the speech given by Kōtoku summing up the significance of the event:

When a sage king appears to govern the realm, Heaven then responds with auspicious omens. In ancient times, during the reigns of Chou Ch'eng-wang, Lord of the West [of China] and Han Ming-ti, white pheasants then appeared. In our own land of Yamato during the reign of Emperor Homuda [Ōjin], a white crow built its nest in the palace. In the time of the Emperor Ōsazaki a

flying horse was seen in the west. Thus from old down to the present many kinds of auspicious omens have appeared in response to virtue.

(NSK Hakuji 1.2.15, NKBZ 3, p. 165; ASTON 2, pp. 238–39)

This event highlights two salient features concerning the role of omens in the political discourse of the period. First, by 650 the Yamato court had apparently adopted the Confucian language of sage kingship as a means of expressing and defining its authority. This in effect placed the figure of the ruler within the context of continental narratives recording the activities of ancient Chinese sage kings. This in turn profoundly altered the political context in which literacy and textual interpretation were situated; by claiming equivalent status to sage rulers from the Chinese past, Yamato rulers were also ensuring a place within political discourse for the study and interpretation of (continental) historical texts in which those sage rulers were represented. As a result, by 650 the use of omens as a source of political authority and political critique had become a basic element in the contestation of power. Omens were used by several factions at court, including the Silla immigrant kinship groups from Naniwa that were at the center of the early Shōtoku cult.

Second, the above text also illustrates the court's near complete dependence upon immigrant intellectuals for interpretations of omens indicating Heaven's pleasure or disfavor. Members of immigrant kinship groups who were most familiar with continental historical texts and interpretive methodologies were in effect responsible for interpreting the will of Heaven and assessing the virtue of the Yamato monarch. Below we shall see that such interpretation was a creative process through which new and distinctive conceptions of sage kingship and sagehood were fashioned.

### *Sage Kings and the Chinese Canon*

The Chinese textual tradition promulgated by immigrant kinship groups in Yamato was itself the product of an intellectual class that saw itself as indispensable servants of Chinese rulers even as they served as a check on the power of those rulers. The early Chinese philosophical tradition thus focused in large part on issues concerning the proper relations between the ruler and his ministers drawn from the intellectual class. These same intellectuals, in turn, were represented as the guardians of the textual tradition that constrained would-be despots in two ways: first, it offered normative guidelines for rulership; second, this same tradition would pass judgement upon each ruler for the edification of future generations. It is instructive in this regard that Chin-shih huang-ti, the first and last emperor to attempt to turn against the textual tradition itself, has been condemned for millennia as a despot.

After Ch'in-shih huang-ti Chinese rulers sought not to eliminate the Chi-

nese textual heritage but rather to standardize and regulate it; henceforth sage rulers were depicted as guardians and regulators of the Chinese literary tradition. Thereafter standardization and regulation became two of the most basic functions of rulership in China and Yamato. These functions played a central role even in Chinese conceptions of Buddhist Kingship. From the fourth century onwards rulers frequently portrayed themselves as dharma kings who could regulate the Buddhist clergy and guard the orthodoxy of the Chinese Buddhist tradition.<sup>14</sup>

One result of these conceptions of sage rulership was the creation of a canon of authoritative texts that served as the basis for political and philosophical discourse. This in turn stimulated the rise of commentarial traditions based upon that canon. As the authority of the textual tradition became clearly demarcated, so too did mastery of the canon provide a mechanism for appropriating at least some of the canon's authority for the critic of past and contemporary events.

This dynamic of focused authority within the canon also invaded the texts that comprised the canon; just as certain texts were considered authoritative, so too did the words and actions of authoritative figures within these texts come to be considered without fault. These figures—sage kings and sage counselors—provided a starting point for post-Han commentators wishing to discuss the perennial issue of the proper standards for ruler and intellectual.

### *The Classification of Sages*

The concept of the sage king (Chinese: *sheng-wang*, *sheng-huang* or *sheng-ti*, Japanese: *hijiri no kimi*) appears to have originated in Han dynasty texts stressing the appearance of omens reflecting Heaven's approval of legendary sage kings from the distant past. Divination and the conception of the sage king thus appear to have been linked from the beginning. For heuristic purposes four types of sage ruler can be distinguished in the Chinese context. First, are the *san-huang*, three sage rulers who play an important role in the creation legends found in the *Shu-ching* and the *Shih-chi*, two of the most authoritative texts in the Chinese canon.<sup>15</sup> These texts discuss the formation of Heaven and Earth and then immediately proceed to describe the emergence of sage rulers for Heaven (*t'ien-huang*), Earth (*ti-huang*) and human society (*jen-huang*). Because the *Shu-ching* and the *Shih-chi* were among the Five Classics which were taught by the Confucian scholars from Paekche, it is almost certain that the conceptions of sage kingship represented by these figures were current in Yamato among those familiar with continental learning from the sixth century onwards.<sup>16</sup>

14. For the role of the dharma king during the Age of the Decline of the Dharma, see NATTIER 1991, especially pp. 119–32.

15. Sources for these conceptions are discussed in NAITŌ 1970, pp. 22–31.

16. The classic work on the introduction of Chinese texts into the Japanese islands remains KOJIMA 1975.

Thus from the Han dynasty onwards the term “sage” denoted far more than extraordinary wisdom; the term also carried with it connotations of cosmic mediation and regulation. This conception of the sage as a cosmic mediator can be found in the *Nihon shoki* account of the creation of the world:

Thus Heaven was formed first, and Earth was established subsequently. Thereafter Divine Beings (*kamu no hijiri* 神の聖) were produced between them. (NSK Age of the Gods 1, NBKZ 1, p. 18; ASTON 1, pp. 2–3)

Although at first glance the use of the character for *hijiri* here to refer to a god may seem unusual, this is a faithful rendering of Chinese usages showing the sage as a “co-creator” of the world both metaphorically and literally at the beginning of the cosmos. This passage also shows the considerable skill used by immigrant kinship groups in adapting Chinese conceptions and terminology to contemporaneous Yamato conceptions of kingship based upon kinship claims with the sun.

Both the *Shu-ching* and the *Shih-chi* also detail the activities of five sage rulers who played the role of culture-givers for humanity, teaching the uses of fire, agriculture, writing, and so on. These five were grouped together under the term “five rulers” (*wu-ti*). The currency and importance of *san-huang* and *wu-ti* is attested by the title assumed by the first Chin emperor, who called himself “*huang-ti*.” Rulers of China assumed this title thereafter.

The conceptual underpinnings for the language of sage kingship in ancient China lay primarily in classical Chinese texts that celebrated the virtue and wisdom of these legendary rulers. During the Six Dynasties period the *san-huang wu-ti* were a basic element of political discourse. Taoists depicted them as sages possessing the secrets of divine rule and immortality. Confucians viewed them as models of benevolence and propriety who served to mediate the workings of Heaven and Earth. All agreed that as the sage ruler worked together with Heaven to bring order to human society, his actions resonated both with Heaven and the innate goodness at the core of each of his subjects (NAITŌ 1970, vol. 10, pp. 22–31). A third group of seven sage rulers consisted of the founders and prominent rulers of three ancient dynasties. These rulers featured prominently in the thinking of Confucius, who sought the essence of sage kingship through the study and emulation of these rulers.

Finally, the founders of dynasties that post-dated Confucius also served as important models for the Yamato court. These rulers were never referred to as sage kings and were depicted in official court histories in terms that are more human than mythic. Nonetheless the founders of the Chin and Han dynasties in particular appear to have enjoyed special status in the eyes of later generations not only in China but in seventh century Yamato as well. In this regard it is noteworthy that the Yamato no Aya, the most powerful cluster of Paekche immigrant groups in seventh century Yamato, claimed descent from the

founder of the Han dynasty, while the Hata claimed descent from Ch'in-shih huang-ti, the founder of Ch'in dynasty.

Although classed well below the ancient sage kings, virtually all dynastic founders are also depicted in the Chinese histories as having access to supernatural support either through the favor of Heaven or the support of powerful deities. In addition, several are depicted as enjoying the support of sage ministers (*sheng-ch'en*), sage counselors (*hsien-hsiang*) or simply wise men (Chinese: *hsien-jen*, Japanese: *sakashihito*) who possessed extraordinary powers of magic and divination. Among the most famous such wise men were Chang Liang, a counselor to the first Han emperor who was later depicted as a Taoist immortal, Chiang T'ai-kung, the famed counselor of the Sage King Chou Wen-wang, and Kuan-tzu, the counselor of Ch'i Huan-kung.<sup>17</sup> I will discuss the role of these figures in the development of Yamato conceptions of sage kingship below.

By the early Han dynasty the conceptions of sage ruler (*sheng-huang*) and sage counselor had taken on a symbiotic role in which the sage counselor guaranteed the legitimacy of the ruler's Heavenly mandate through the bestowal of tokens of authority that had been manifested by Heaven.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the Six Dynasties period rulers had themselves declared Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Taoist sages by assorted clerics and would-be spiritual rulers of China. The importance of these titles is attested by the fact that they were known throughout East Asia. When relations between Yamato and the Sui resumed during the period of Shōtoku's regency, for instance, the Yamato court addressed the Sui monarch as the "Bodhisattva Emperor"—a title conferred upon Sui Yang-ti by the T'ien-t'ai patriarch Chih-i.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Sage King and Sage Counselor in the Seventeen Article Constitution*

The currency of these conceptions of sage kingship among Yamato intellectuals can be seen in the Seventeen-Article Constitution attributed to Shōtoku. The text, which is filled with quotes and allusions from classical Chinese sources, represents the best statement on the concept of the sage ruler in early Yamato literature. The importance attached to this document by the time of the writing of the *Nihon shoki* can be seen from the inclusion of the entire text within that work. Although the *Nihon shoki* attributes authorship of the text to Shōtoku, I will treat it as reflecting the views of the immigrant kinship groups associated with the early Shōtoku cult—even if we accept the *Nihon shoki*'s assertion that Shōtoku was the author of the text, Shōtoku's approach to the Chinese textual tradition was doubtless shaped in great part by his immigrant teachers.

17. Henceforth I will refer to all sage advisors, counselors, and so on as *sakashihito*.

18. This process, and its implications for the later development of the Taoist tradition in China are discussed in SEIDEL, 1969–1970.

19. This incident is discussed in KANEKO 1992, pp. 28–33.

Ōno Tatsunosuke has analyzed the constitution from the standpoint of its Chinese conceptual background. He concludes that, in addition to Buddhist influences, the text closely resembles the *Kuan-tzu*, an important apocryphal compilation from the fourth century that purports to record the teachings of the Sage Counselor Kuan-tzu, to whom I made reference above (Ōno 1970, pp. 206–7).

This affinity with a text claiming to be the work of a Chinese sage counselor reflects the constitution's preoccupation with delineating the role of the counselors and ministers of Yamato rulers. The text contains five direct references to the concept of the sage ruler, virtually all of which emphasize the importance of the *sakashihito* for the sage ruler:

Regardless of their degree of urgency, if you meet a wise man, matters will by themselves become settled. For this reason the state will last throughout the ages and society will never be endangered. For this reason the sage kings of the past sought men to fill [ministerial] positions, and did not seek positions for men. (NSK Suiko, 12.4.3, NKBZ 2, pp. 545–46; ASTON 2, p. 130)

The constitution also highlights the role of the *sakashihito* as an indispensable element in rulership: “If the sage does not meet a sage counselor (*sakashihito*), then how shall he rule?”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, within the text the *sakashihito* takes on a supernatural aura of only a slightly lower order than the sage king: “The chance to meet a man of wisdom [*sakashihito*] comes only once in five hundred years and it is difficult to meet one sage in a thousand years” (NSK Suiko 12.4.3, NKBZ 2, p. 546).

### *Counselors of the Yamato Sage*

This belief in the importance of the role of the *sakashihito* is also apparent in several accounts of events leading to the selection of rulers. The ruler Kinmei, for instance, is judged to be worthy of the throne because he “treats the wise (*sakashihito*) with courtesy, and all day long neglects his food while he waits on others.”<sup>21</sup> Although no one takes such passages to be literally true, it is clear that by the time of the writing of the *Nihon shoki* such sentiments were a basic part of the rhetoric of Yamato kingship.

The role of immigrant kinship groups in promoting this conception of the *sakashihito* as an indispensable element of rule can be clearly seen once we ask who were the “wise people” that Kinmei is said to have treated with such cour-

20. Aston splits the fairly standard compound “*sakashihijiri*” into two, rendering the passage “If we do not meet with wise men and sages, then how shall the country be governed?” (ASTON 2, p. 132).

21. NSK, Kinmei, period prior to his assumption, NKBZ 2, pp. 357–8; ASTON 2, p. 37. The text is a paraphrase from the *Shih-chi* where the Sage King Chou Wen-wang is praised in almost exactly the same terms. The text goes on to note that “the people therefore flocked to him.”



tesy. This is spelled out in the text immediately before the passage quoted above:

When the Emperor was young he had a dream in which someone said to him  
 “If you favor a man called Hata Ōtsuchi, then when you come of age you will  
 surely possess the realm.

(NSK Kinmei, period prior to his assumption, NKBZ 2, p. 357; ASTON 2, p. 36)

Kinmei’s dream appears to be based upon a similar legend in the *Shih-chi* in which the Sage King Chou Wen-wang is told in a dream that he will rule the empire if he finds a man named Chiang T’ai-kung to serve as his (sage) counselor. This supposition is supported by the fact that the *Nihon shoki* continues to refer to Kinmei in terms originally used in the *Shih-chi* to describe Chou Wen-wang’s ability to attract sage counselors such as Chiang T’ai-kung. Thus the *Nihon shoki* appears to have modeled Kinmei more or less explicitly upon the Sage King Chou Wen-wang, while the Hata ancestor Ōtsuchi plays a role akin to that of the Sage Counselor Chiang T’ai-kung, making possible Kinmei’s accession.<sup>22</sup>

A closer look at the legend also reveals how immigrant kinship groups such as the Hata used the ideal of the *sakashihito* to weave their own ancestral cults into the basic fabric of Yamato kingship. The text continues:

When [Kinmei] awoke, he sent messengers out to search everywhere. In Fukakusa township in the Kii district of Yamashiro province they found a man whose surname and name were the same as that of the dream. At this [Kinmei] was delighted through and through and he exclaimed “There has never been such a dream!” He then asked [Ōtsuchi] if anything [unusual] had happened to him. He answered, “Nothing. However, when your servant was returning from a trading expedition to Ise I encountered two wolves on a mountain that were fighting and soiled with blood. I then dismounted from my horse, rinsed my mouth and hands and prayed to them, saying: “You are august deities but you delight in violence. If you should meet with a hunter, you would very quickly be captured.” At this I stopped them from fighting and wiped and cleaned the blood from their fur. I then released them, having saved both of their lives.” The Emperor said “This must be your reward.” Thereafter he kept [Ōtsuchi] close by his side and favored him anew each day,

22. This supposition is also supported by the fact that Chiang T’ai-kung appears to have been a particularly venerated figure among the Yamato elite. In addition to being one of the most famous sage counselors, he was also the reputed author of the *Liu-t’ao*, a text on military and political strategy that had been transmitted to Yamato prior to the Taika era. The esteem in which the *Liu-t’ao* was held can be seen from a passage in the *Tōshi kaden*, which states that Fujiwara Kamatari devoted himself to the study of the text and Chiang T’ai-kung’s teachings [*Tōshi kaden*, p. 875].

so that he eventually accumulated great wealth. When Kinmei ascended the throne, he appointed him to the Treasury.

(NSK Kinmei, period prior to accession, NKBZ 2, pp. 357–8; ASTON 2, pp. 36–37)

This legend highlights two important points regarding the role of the Hata in the construction of the conception of the Yamato sage king. First, it shows how the Hata and other such immigrant kinship groups used the conception of the sage ruler to promote local cults and heroes with whom they were closely affiliated. The notion of the *sakashihito* proved to be a boon, not a challenge, to pre-existing local cults; in this case, the legend appears to be based upon the founding legend of the Fushimi Inari shrine, a Hata cultic center in Fukukusa. Second, unlike Chinese sage counselors such as Chiang T' ai-kung, Hata no Ōtsuchi's abilities are mainly sacerdotal; his good fortune is "undoubtedly a reward" for his propitiation of two "august deities." Below we shall see that the ancestral deities of Silla immigrant kinship groups frequently doubled in the *Nihon shoki* as *sakashihito* for the sage rulers of ancient Yamato.

#### *Of Kings and King Makers*

The emphasis in the above legend on the importance of the *sakashihito* as king maker appears to be closely related to the hermeneutic authority of the immigrant kinship groups that declared Yamato rulers to be sage kings. A close reading of other legends that depict Yamato rulers as sage kings suggests that such rulers were almost always paired with a second sage to hail the ruler's virtue. This pairing of sages was in keeping with Chinese conceptions of sage rulership; it was not enough for a ruler to be deemed a sage by an ordinary mortal: confirmation could only come from another figure in possession of sagelike wisdom. Thus the *Wei chih* notes: "Only a wise man (Japanese: *sakashihito*) knows a wise man. Only a sage knows a sage."<sup>23</sup> This belief appears to have been particularly prominent in the early Shōtoku legend corpus. In addition to the legend of the death of the monk Hye-cha, this belief is explicitly stated at the end of another legend recounting Shōtoku's encounter with a sage beggar on the road to Kataoka:

At the time the people all marveled at this and said "It is true that a sage knows a sage!" and they were more and more in awe of him.

(NSK Suiko 21.11.2, NKBZ 2, p. 571; ASTON 2, p. 145)

The strong ethnic coloration of this motif of pairing sages can be seen from

23. This is discussed briefly in the *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* edition of the *Nihon shoki* (NKBT 2, p. 200, n. 2).

the following chart which chronicles every use of the term “sage king” in the *Nihon shoki* in terms of speaker, referent and ethnic affiliation:

References to Sage Kings in the *Nihon shoki*

Chapter	Speaker	Referent	Speaker’s Ancestral Nation
1. Suinin	Ame no Hiboko	Suinin	Silla
2. Suinin	Arashito	Suinin	Mimana
3. Suinin	Tajima mori	Sujin	Silla
4. Suiko	Hye-cha	Shōtoku	Koguryō
5. Chūai	“people”	Jingū	?
6. Jingū	Silla king	Jingū	Silla
7. Jingū	Paekche king	Jingū	Paekche
8. Jingū	Paekche envoy	Jingū	Paekche
9. Nintoku	Prince Uji	Nintoku	Yamato
10. Nintoku	Nintoku	Ancient Kings	Yamato
11. Nintoku	Nintoku	Ancient Kings	Yamato
12. Nintoku	editor	Nintoku	————
13. Yomei	editor	Shōtoku	————
14. Suiko 12.4	(Shōtoku)	Ancient Kings	Yamato
15. Suiko	Monk	To-heun	Suiko Paekche
16. Jōmei	Yamashiro Ōe	Shōtoku <sup>24</sup>	Yamato
17. Kōtoku	Kōtoku	Ancient Kings	Yamato
18. Kōtoku	Kōtoku	Ancient Kings	Yamato
19. Kōtoku	Kōtoku	Ancient Kings	Yamato

This list provides several clues for understanding conceptions of sage kingship in Yamato. Most obviously, the sheer volume of references to sage kings indicates that the concept of the sage ruler was a central element in the construction of imperial authority by the time of the writing of the *Nihon shoki*.<sup>25</sup> More important than the number of usages, however, are the twin issues of who had the authority to use the term and whom the term designated. Once we distinguish between cases where the term is used by Yamato rulers and those

24. Aston takes this to be a reference to Suiko (ASTON 2, p. 163). Mayuzumi Hiromichi’s notes to the text in the *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikai* edition of the *Nihon shoki* make clear, however, that the intended referent is Shōtoku (NKBT 2, p. 225, notes 15 and 17).

25. In compiling this list I have restricted myself to instances where the terms *hijiri no kimi* and *hijiri no mikado* (聖皇 or 聖帝) are actually used. Note that the term *hijiri* did not take on a connotation of mountain asceticism until much later. See KLEIN 1999.

cases where it is used in reference to Yamato rulers, the degree to which immigrant kinship groups at the forefront of the early Shōtoku cult shaped the discourse on sage kingship during the period becomes apparent.

#### *Use of the Term “Sage King” by Yamato Rulers*

As the above chart makes clear, in each instance where the term “sage king” or its equivalent is used by a Yamato ruler, the referent is always either an imperial ancestor or the ancient sage kings of China. This suggests that by the time of the writing of the *Nihon shoki* the ancient sage kings from China were normative models of kingship for Yamato rulers. The adoption of Chinese rulers as models also entailed adoption of a particular historical perspective in which the will of Heaven was manifested periodically within history through the appearance of omens. In proclaiming their desire to follow in the tradition of the ancient Chinese sage kings, Yamato rulers thus also presented themselves as working in a continuously unfolding historical narrative; in the monk Hye-cha’s words, they “continued the plans of the former sages.” This seems to have been the case dating from the period during and just after Kamitsumiya’s lifetime; the Seventeen Article Constitution and Kōtoku’s proclamations contain over fifteen direct and indirect references to ancient Chinese sages.

The above chart also shows that after Empress Jingū the Yamato figure most frequently associated with the concept of the sage king was Shōtoku. He is referred to as such by Yamashiro no Ōe, by Hye-cha, and by the editors of the *Nihon shoki*.<sup>26</sup> Jingū’s association with the concept most likely reflects the fact that the Jingū legend cycle was undergoing extensive development during the period of the composition of the *Nihon shoki* (TSUKAGUCHI 1984, pp. 87–107).

Further evidence for this can be seen from the formulaic attributions of the term to rulers on the Korean peninsula and their envoys. Shōtoku’s association with the concept, on the other hand, may have been a result of the frequent use of such language in the Seventeen Article Constitution that was attributed to him. It also doubtless reflects the importance of kinship groups affiliated with the early Shōtoku cult in the formation of the concept of the Yamato sage king.

#### *Uses of the Term “Sage King” by Non-Imperial Speakers*

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the above chart, however, is that, excluding attributions from editors and “the people,” in virtually every instance where Yamato rulers are referred to as sage kings the speaker either comes from one of the Korean kingdoms or is from an immigrant kinship group that traces its ancestry back to the Korean kingdoms. Simply put, in the *Nihon shoki*, it is for-

26. Shōtoku is also referred to by the term “sage king” in Hōryū-ji sources such as the inscription from the Yakushi triad. I have not included these instances due to difficulties in confirming their dating.

eign envoys, immigrant gods and immigrant monks that declare Yamato rulers to be sages.

Further, and crucially, a closer look at the list of people who declare Yamato rulers to be sage kings also indicates that in the majority of cases these *sakashihito* were ancestors of the immigrant kinship groups at the forefront of the early Shōtoku cult. Thus the first three figures on the list—Ame no Hiboko, Tsunoga no Arashito, Tajima mori and Hye-cha—are not only heralded in the *Nihon shoki* as gods or sages, they are also identified as ancestral deities of immigrant kinship groups such as the Hata and Miyake.

This pattern is also repeated in the apparently unrelated case of the Paekche monk To-heun, who makes his declaration to one Naniwa Kishi Muraji no Tokumaro, ancestor of one of the most prominent kinship groups in the early Shōtoku cult.<sup>27</sup> Even the instance of the “people” hailing Jingū as a sage ruler at the Bay of Nuta in Wakasa province may reflect the influence of the kinship groups at the forefront of the early Shōtoku cult; recently discovered *mokkan* (木簡, narrow trips of wood used for official messages) suggest that this area was heavily populated by both the Miyake and the Hata (KANO 1971, pp. 263–82). Add to this the four cases directly involving Shōtoku and it becomes apparent that the overwhelming majority of references in the *Nihon shoki* to Yamato rulers as sage kings are closely related to the immigrant kinship groups that helped create the early Shōtoku cult. These kinship groups created the legends that hailed ancient Yamato rulers as sage kings. These kinship groups discovered omens such as the *hakuji* that established living Yamato rulers as sages. These kinship groups established Shōtoku as the paradigmatic sage of Yamato. Finally, these kinship groups also established their own ancestors as the Wise Counselors who served to authenticate the sage wisdom and virtue of the rulers of Yamato.

### Conclusion

The introduction of Chinese historical and divinatory texts into Yamato from Paekche in the sixth century led to a reformulation of imperial authority based upon Chinese conceptions of sage kingship. In adopting this framework, Yamato rulers needed to construct a fairly elaborate conceptual and social apparatus based upon a textual corpus controlled mainly by immigrant kinship groups from the Korean peninsula. Among the most important aspects of this new framework was the propagation of Chinese historical texts in which the actions of previous sages were recounted and in terms of which the actions of Yamato rulers could be explained. These texts also expounded on the nature of sage kingship, methods of divination, and the interpretation of omens. The intro-

27. It appears highly likely that a Kishi document was the source for this report; records from another Kishi ambassador are explicitly referred to in Saimei 5.7.3, NKBZ 3, p. 272; ASTON 2, p. 263.

duction and adoption of these texts was accompanied by the formation of a class of intellectuals with mastery of this corpus and authority to interpret signs of Heaven's favor or displeasure with the ruler.

Because immigrant kinship groups served as the interpreters and gatekeepers of this textual corpus, they were in a uniquely privileged position from which to transform continental models of kingship within the framework of early Yamato society. Kinship groups affiliated with the early Shōtoku cult used this position both to construct an image of Shōtoku as the paramount sage of Yamato and to ensure that their ancestors were portrayed as wise men paired with Yamato sage kings. In so doing they helped redefine the basis for the exercise of power in early Yamato.

By establishing their own ancestral legends at the basis of the court's understanding of sage kingship, these kinship groups also ensured that the cultic centers and practices associated with their ancestral cults became basic elements in imperial myth and ritual. Thus did the close correlation between literacy and ethnicity in seventh century Japan help lead, ironically, to the construction of a new identity for imperial ancestors and a new cultic identity of the imperial house.

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