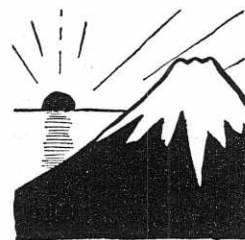


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CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST RECORDS OF JAPAN

The oldest extant annals in Japanese are the *Records of Ancient Matters* (A.D. 712) and the *Chronicles of Japan* (720).¹ Both open with chapters on the mythological Age of the Gods, but little of the material from the ancient Japanese past can be taken seriously as history. It is not until we reach the reign of the Empress Suiko (592–628) that consciously written history became a reality; indeed, the name Suiko itself may be translated “conjecture of the past,” and suggests that this posthumous title was bestowed on the empress because the writing of history was considered to be an outstanding event of her reign.

For information about the earlier periods of Japanese history it is usually safer to rely on accounts found in the Chinese dynastic histories than on the native literature. By the time that Japan first came into the ken of the Chinese, the writing of history had left far behind the rather primitive level of the *Book of History* and was approaching a science. In contrast to the highly tendentious and even fictional Japanese descriptions of their early history, the Chinese accounts of Japan, brief as they are, possess comparative reliability, if for no other reason than that the Chinese had no axe to grind with respect to a semicivilized people living at what was for them the end of the world.

According to the *Chronicles of Japan* the foundation of the Japanese empire took place at a date corresponding to 660 B.C., but the first mention of Japan in the Chinese histories occurs only in A.D. 57. At this latter date, Japan, far from being a unified country with a heritage of 700 years of civilization, consisted of more than a hundred scattered tribal communities. Even as late as the Chinese Three Kingdoms Period (220–265) Japan was still divided into some forty communities.

The Chinese histories do not inform us how the people now known as

¹ The *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*.

the Japanese first found their way to the islands. In the absence of positive information on this subject, modern scholars have attempted to expound various theories based on linguistics, archeology, architecture, and a great many criteria, some contending that the Japanese originally came from Southeast Asia, others insisting that they were a northern people. It is probable, however, that the Japanese had diverse origins, with various elements entering from different directions. The main stream of cultural influence came from the continent by way of Korea. It seems likely that when the first Ch'in emperor (247-210 B.C.) unified China and built the Great Wall to prevent the northern barbarians from making incursions on the fertile plains of the Yellow River, it helped to set a definite direction to the migrations of different peoples, eastwards or westwards along the wall. Disturbances resulting from the movement of tribes were at times so severe as to compel the Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.) of the Han dynasty to send expeditionary forces to restore order. An outpost of the Han empire was established in northern Korea which served as a model of organized government to the surrounding tribes including, possibly, the Japanese.

It may seem surprising that there were Japanese in Korea in the first century A.D., but no fixed boundary appears in fact to have existed at the time between the territories of the Koreans and of the Japanese. A constant eastward migration from northern China to the Korean peninsula and thence to the Japanese archipelago made for a fluidity in the composition of the population. Despite Korean references of the fourth century A.D. to "Japanese invaders," there continued to be Japanese holdings on the continent until A.D. 562 when the Japanese political center in the peninsula was destroyed by the rising power of the Korean kingdom of Silla. As late as A.D. 478 the Japanese emperor was recognized by the Chinese court as being ruler of Korea, although the Japanese emperor in turn proclaimed his fealty to the Chinese sovereign. During the course of the seventh century Silla, with Chinese aid, subjugated the rival kingdoms of Koguryō and Paekche, and unified the peninsula. These successes of the combined forces of Silla and T'ang China drove the Japanese from the continent into the relative isolation of their islands, an event which may have helped to bring about the birth of historical Japan. The rise of powerful dynasties in China and Korea impelled Japan to achieve a unified government if it were not to be overwhelmed.

For an understanding of some important influences upon Japanese thought since the earliest periods of their history, we may turn to the geographical features of the islands. The first Chinese account of Japan opens with the words, "The people of Wa live on mountainous islands in the ocean," and the two elements of water and mountains, together with a kind of sun worship have always been very close to the Japanese. Of course we are likely to find in the religious beliefs of any country worship of the striking or beneficial aspects of nature, but the combination of these three elements is especially characteristic of Japan. The numerous clear streams and the ever present ocean have always delighted the Japanese, as we may tell from their earliest poetry. To their love of water the Japanese have joined a passion for lustration and cleanliness, and in our own day for swimming. The Japanese love of mountains is not surprising in a country renowned for its numerous peaks, especially the incomparable Mt. Fuji, and the worship of the sun is not unnatural in a country blessed with a temperate climate. Today we can still appreciate what an awe-inspiring experience it must have been for the Japanese of any age to stand on the summit of Mt. Fuji and greet the glowing sun as it rose from the waters of the Pacific. Other characteristics of the Japanese found in the early Chinese accounts and which still seem true today include honesty, politeness, gentleness in peace and bravery in war, and a love of liquor.

The Japanese accounts of the birth of the gods and of the foundation of Japan belong of course to the realm of mythology rather than history, but they afford us a glimpse of Japanese attitudes toward life and the universe when civilization was just beginning to glimmer. Also since great importance was attached to these legends by later Japanese, some knowledge of them is indispensable to the study of Japanese thought.

JAPAN IN THE CHINESE DYNASTIC HISTORIES

The following extracts are from the official histories of successive Chinese dynasties beginning with the Latter Han (A.D. 25-220). However, the first of these accounts to be written was that for the Kingdom of Wei (220-265), compiled about A.D. 297. The *History of the Latter Han* was compiled about 445 and incorporates much from the earlier description of the Japanese.

These accounts are contained in a section devoted to the barbarian neigh-

bors of China at the end of each history. Thus they do not occupy a prominent place in these works, being more in the nature of an afterthought or footnote. Particularly in the earlier accounts the information is apt to be scattered and disconnected, and of course is presented by official chroniclers who view Japanese affairs with an eye to Chinese interests and prestige.

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

ACCOUNTS OF THE EASTERN BARBARIANS

History of the Kingdom of Wei (Wei Chih) c. A.D. 297

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

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

The land of Wa is warm and mild. In winter as in summer the people live on raw vegetables and go about barefooted. They have [or live in] houses; father and mother, elder and younger, sleep separately. They smear their bodies with pink and scarlet, just as the Chinese use powder. They serve food on bamboo and wooden trays, helping themselves with their fingers. When a person dies, they prepare a single coffin, without an outer one. They cover the graves with earth to make a mound. When death occurs, mourning is observed for more than ten days, during which

period they do not eat meat. The head mourners wail and lament, while friends sing, dance, and drink liquor. When the funeral is over, all members of the family go into the water to cleanse themselves in a bath of purification.

When they go on voyages across the sea to visit China, they always select a man who does not comb his hair, does not rid himself of fleas, lets his clothing get as dirty as it will, does not eat meat, and does not lie with women. This man behaves like a mourner and is known as the "mourning keeper." When the voyage meets with good fortune, they all lavish on him slaves and other valuables. In case there is disease or mishap, they kill him, saying that he was not scrupulous in observing the taboos. . . .

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

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

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

The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the

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

In the sixth month of the second year of Ching-ch'u [A.D. 238], the Queen of Wa sent the grandee Nashonmi and others to visit the prefecture [of Tai-fang], where they requested permission to proceed to the Emperor's court with tribute. The Governor, Liu Hsia, dispatched an officer to accompany the party to the capital. In answer to the Queen of Wa, an edict of the Emperor, issued in the twelfth month of the same year, said as follows: "Herein we address Pimiko, Queen of Wa, whom we now officially call a friend of Wei. The Governor of Tai-fang, Liu Hsia, has sent a messenger to accompany your vassal, Nashonmi, and his lieutenant, Tsushi Gori. They have arrived here with your tribute, consisting of four male slaves and six female slaves, together with two pieces of cloth with designs, each twenty feet in length. You live very far away across the sea; yet you have sent an embassy with tribute. Your loyalty and filial piety we appreciate exceedingly. We confer upon you, therefore, the title 'Queen of Wa Friendly to Wei,' together with the decoration of the gold seal with purple ribbon. The latter, properly encased, is to be sent to you through the Governor. We expect you, O Queen, to rule your people in peace and to endeavor to be devoted and obedient." . . .

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

A relative of Pimiko named Iyo, a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored. Cheng [the Chinese ambassador] issued a proclamation to the effect that Iyo was the ruler. Then Iyo sent a delegation of twenty under the grandee Yazaku, General of the Imperial Guard, to accompany Cheng home [to China]. The delegation visited the

capital and presented thirty male and female slaves. It also offered to the court five thousand white gems and two pieces of carved jade, as well as twenty pieces of brocade with variegated designs.

History of the Latter Han Dynasty (Hou Han Shu) c. A.D. 445

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

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

In the second year of the Chien-wu Chung-yüan era [A.D. 57], the Wa country Nu sent an envoy with tribute who called himself *ta-fu*. This country is located in the southern extremity of the Wa country. Emperor Kuang-wu bestowed on him a seal. . . .

During the reigns of Huan-ti [147-168] and Ling-ti [168-189] the country of Wa was in a state of great confusion, war and conflict raging on all sides. For a number of years, there was no ruler. Then a woman named Pimiko appeared. Remaining unmarried, she occupied herself with magic and sorcery and bewitched the populace. Thereupon they placed her on the throne. She kept one thousand female attendants, but few people saw her. There was only one man who was in charge of her wardrobe and meals and acted as the medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockade, with the protection of armed guards. The laws and customs were strict and stern.

History of the Liu Sung Dynasty (Sung Shu) c. A.D. 513

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

The following extract is preceded by an account of four successive Japanese rulers who asked to be confirmed in their titles by the Chinese court. One of these titles was "Generalissimo Who Maintains Peace in the East Commanding with Battle-Ax All Military Affairs in the Six Countries of Wa, Paekche, Silla, Imna, Chin-han and Mok-han." Wa refers to Japan, and the other five names