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Creating a Sacred Narrative – *Kojiki* Studies and Shintō Nationalism¹

In 2012, the 1300th anniversary of the recording of the *Kojiki* will be celebrated. The work generally is regarded not only as the oldest surviving example of Japanese literary history but also as a holy text of Shintō, understood as the Japanese national religion. The currently exist-ing text editions of the *Kojiki* still are generally based on the works by the famous Japanese philologist and religious ideologue of nativism, Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801). But his commentary work *Kojiki-den*, which without doubt is a masterpiece of philology, was not dedicated to textual comprehension alone, as the author undertook the effort to modify and (re-) construct the reading of the text with a clearly ideological intention: as the ultimate source of religious legitimacy of Japanese imperial sovereignty. For modern research it is therefore no longer possible, as was undisputed for ages, to regard the *Kojiki* exclusively as a document of antiquity. There is evidence to understand the *Kojiki* as a text of modernity too, which has gained its present form, meaning and function only through *kokugaku* nativism and nationalism.

Keywords: *Kojiki* – Shintō – kokugaku – nativism – Imperial legitimation



1. *Constructions of the Beginning*

If a student of Japanese history were to research wartime books dating from the 1930s or 1940s, he or she would probably be astonished to find that some of this material contains some strange dates of publication; this is especially true for books that were published in the year 1940. Books published in this year do not only appear under the date of *Shōwa* 15, but for some of these books, there is a third possible variant. For example, the work *Ise Daijingu sankeiki*, which was published in Tokyo, is given the publication date of neither 1940 nor *Shōwa* 15, but the year 2,600. Here we are confronted with a specific Japanese calendar, which is no longer in use, but was quite popular during wartime Japan – this is the so called *kigen* 紀元

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calendar, a linear chronological system, starting with the date of the alleged founding of the Japanese Empire (*kōki* 皇紀) by the so-called first emperor Jimmu Tennō. By this calendar, the year of his accession to the throne and founding of the empire corresponds to the Western date of 660 B.C.² As we know very well, this date must be regarded as purely legendary, having been designed artificially by the compilers of the earliest Japanese classics that date to the 8th century. They followed chronological speculations in accordance with the Chinese 60-years cycle. As John Brownlee (1991: 31) points out, the year 601, which was the ninth year of the reign of Empress Suiko, “provided a basis from which to calculate backwards.” Using a combined system of cycles with a year called *ippō* as “a time of great change,” the compilers of the *Nihon shoki* calculated back for a period of 1,260 years, “and arrived at 660 B.C. for the *ippō*, which had to be the year of accession of Emperor Jimmu.” (Cf. Brownlee 1991: 31)

1. 1 History vs. Ideology

This date became a sacrosanct founding date for the Japanese empire,³ and was not historically questioned until the 20th century. Even in present day Japan, it constitutes the symbolic starting point of the history of the Japanese state, and is commemorated on February 11th as the national holiday *Kenkoku kinen no hi* 建国記念の日, the direct successor of the Meiji-period holiday of *Kigen-setsu*.⁴ As Brownlee (1991: 32) states, “the accession of Jimmu in 660 B.C. became an established truth, which no historian in traditional Japan would ever have thought of questioning.” In 1940, the 2,600th anniversary of the legendary accession of Jimmu marked an extremely ideologically important occasion in wartime Japan.⁵ Festivals and events

2. “The method of counting years from the legendary founding of Japan (in 660 BC) was begun in the early Meiji period (1868–1912) and commonly used until the end of World War II, when it was abandoned. To find the Western equivalent for a year, simply subtract 660 from the number. The word *kigen* (the beginning of the dynasty) or *kōki* (imperial era) is sometimes prefixed to such dates to differentiate them from years of the Christian era.” (Webb 1983: 232)
3. “The chronology which fixes the date of the accession of Jimmu Tennō at 660 B.C. is officialized in modern Japanese law and in imperial edict alike.” (Holtom 1922: 189)
4. “The nation was presented as beginning with the accession of Emperor Jimmu, an occasion commemorated in the annual Kigen-setsu rite. The accession was thought to have occurred 2,530 years earlier, and in 1870 a system of counting historical time based on it was begun.” (Hardacre 1989: 103)
5. Brownlee (1991: 1-2) writes: “1940 – A Year of Singular Importance. The year 1940 was the 2,600th anniversary of the accession of the first Emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu in 660 B.C. The event was entirely mythical; yet, remarkably, the government of Japan was organized under a constitution of 1889, which accepted the event as historical. The unbroken succession of Emperors from Emperor Jimmu was the explicit basis for Japanese imperial sovereignty. His accession was recorded in two works of historical writing unrivaled in authority, *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712 A. D.), and *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720 A.D).”

throughout the whole year commemorated this date, since Jinmu, the so-called First Emperor, stood at the center of the ultra-nationalistic *kokutai* (国体 “national essence”) ideology of that period.⁶ Even a hymn to mark the 2,600th anniversary of the *kigen* was composed, to commemorate the foundation of the Japanese empire.⁷

Although the findings of archaeological research and comparative history since the end of the 19th century had definitely proven the legendary nature of this founding date, it did not lose any significance as an ideological construct in modern Japan from the Meiji period until the end of World War II. It was the eminent scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain, the first translator of the *Kojiki* into a Western language, who mentioned it in his still highly valuable⁸ “introduction” to the work, and, speaking before the *Asiatic Society of Japan* on April 12th and June 21st, 1882,⁹ he stated that the real history of the Japanese state must be regarded as “more than a thousand years later than the date usually accepted.” (Chamberlain 1883 (1982): lxx) And he continued by stating, “400 A.D. is approximately the highest limit of reliable Japanese history.” (Chamberlain 1883 (1982): lxxxvii) Chamberlain even reached a highly modern conclusion theoretically opposing the idea of Japanese cultural homogeneity and exclusivity by stating, “in almost all known cases culture has been introduced from abroad, and has not been spontaneously developed.” (Chamberlain 1883 (1982): xciii) This is a remarkable standpoint for the 1880s, one that seems to anticipate modern comparative culture studies.

Historical and archaeological research since Chamberlain’s time has proven these statements to be correct. But for State Shintō,¹⁰ having been based on the idea of a homogenous Japanese family state understood as *shinkoku* 神国, the “country of the gods” with a deified emperor as its head, the illusion of a monogenetic foundation through Jinmu Tennō never became obscure. The first histories of the country, namely the *Kojiki*, dating from 712 A.D., and the *Nihon shoki*, which is dated to 720 A.D., served as sources for this central concept. The *Kojiki* became elevated to the status of a holy book of State Shintō in modern Japan thanks to the influence of the Motoori Norinaga’s (1730-1801) fundamental commentary *Kojiki-den*.¹¹

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6. For a discussion of the development of this ideological concept in Japan cf. *inter alia* Antoni 1998.
 7. Weiner (2004: 50 note 21) writes: “In 1940, ‘2,600 Years Since the Nation’s Founding’, an officially sponsored song commemorating the anniversary of the founding of the nation by Emperor Jimmu, captured many of the prevailing visual images of transcendence with ornate and appropriately archaic lyrics about ‘the glorious light of Japan,’ ‘pure gratitude burning like a flame,’ ‘the glistening national power,’ and ‘the rising sun of everlasting prosperity.’”
 8. Cf. Naumann 1996: 19.
 9. Chamberlain 1883 (1982): i-ci.
 10. Cf. Hardacre 1989; Holtom 1922; Antoni 1998.
 11. It was the policy of the central government during the Meiji period, “to restrict the shrine pantheon to deities mentioned in the *Kojiki*” (Hardacre 1989: 74).

1. 2 Germany and Japan

There is evidence that the Japanese *kokutai* ideology of the 1930s and 1940s won high admiration in wartime Germany, not only among the ideologues of the contemporaneous National Socialist (Nazi) Party but among ordinary people as well.¹² Germany's admiration for Japan in those days centered on two areas: the military, based on what people understood of *bushidō*, and, more importantly, the national-racist image of Japan as an allegedly completely homogeneous people connected with their sovereign in absolute unity, in possession of a continuous imperial history and independent from foreign influences. This image was, as can easily be seen, quite identical with the picture that had been drawn tirelessly among nationalists in Japan at that time. According to official opinion, since the Meiji Restoration, Japan's unique and incomparable national polity, the *kokutai*, had established an absolute unity among the people with the emperor as their father – a national family in a real sense.

Given this ideological context, it is not surprising that the official Japanese self-image made an impact in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. Japan seemed to have already put into effect most of what Germany's national-racist ideologists were so passionately struggling for: an unswerving homogenous nation, founded solidly on the basis of an age-old mythology. In contrast to Germany, Japan appeared to have maintained the mythical unity of leadership and the people as well as a racial mode of virtue and public morality. (Cf. Antoni 1998: 272-275)

The 2,600th anniversary of the alleged foundation of the Japanese Empire was commemorated among interested Germans in 1940 too. There were festival activities in Berlin during that year and institutions of German-Japanese cultural relations were active in commemorating this anniversary.¹³ Especially notable is a joint publication project of the *Japan Institute at Berlin* ("Japaninstitut zu Berlin") and the *Japanese German Culture Institute at Tokyo* ("Japanisch-Deutsches Kulturinstitut zu Tokyo"). In 1940, in commemoration of the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese Empire, both institutions presented an enormous work of philological research, a new edition of the *Kojiki* in two parts, and announced a plan for a complete translation of the text into German as part three. The main editor and translator of the whole project

12. For this section see Antoni 1998 and 2004.

13. Cf. Friese 1984: 276. A coeval ideological pamphlet in *Monumenta Nipponica* (cf. Heuvers and Uda, 1940: 363) commemorated the event as follows: "Das Jahr 1940 wird in Japan als das 2600. Jahr der Reichsgründung gefeiert. Es ist ein Jahr der Besinnung auf das Wesen des japanischen Volkes. Dieses Wesen liegt im Verhältnis vom Herrscher zum Volk. Die durch die Jahrtausende waltende Herrscherfamilie ist das tragende, belebende und zur Einheit zusammenfassende Prinzip des Volkes."

was a scholar quite unknown today, Kinoshita Iwao (1894-1980). Because of the importance of his work for the reception of the *Kojiki* in Germany and Japan in the 1940s, I shall discuss Kinoshita's life and work here in some detail.

2. Kinoshita's *Kojiki*

Kinoshita's work was already planned in 1923 and thus it is not causally related to the "axis" politics between Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, it was partially finished in 1940, commemorating the alleged 2,600th anniversary of the empire, and played a significant role in this new ideological context. The entire work was originally designed to comprise five volumes (cf. Yake et al. 2001: 2), but during Kinoshita's lifetime only the first three parts appeared in print: a complete Japanese text of the *Kojiki* (Part 1, heretofore Kinoshita 1940a), a complete romanization of this text (Part 2, heretofore Kinoshita 1940b), and a complete translation of this text into German (Part 3). Unfortunately, this third part consisting of the German translation was lost – the manuscript was never published, as it was destroyed in a fire bombing of Tokyo in 1944. The whole text of the translation as well as the notes and commentary were completely lost.¹⁴ More than twenty years after the war, Kinoshita began his translation project again, but as he was serving as the head priest (*gūji*) of his family Shintō shrine Kashii-gū near Fukuoka, it took him until 1976 to finish and publish the translation. This edition, announced as the missing third volume of his *Kojiki* project, could not, of course, appear as a publication of the no-longer extant institutions of prewar and wartime Japanese-German relations. So Kinoshita privately published his translation, sans commentary, as a publication of his Kashii-gū in Fukuoka. (Kinoshita 1976)

In the preface of this work, the author comments on the 36-year delay of publication. Interestingly, as he did with the first and second volumes in 1940, Kinoshita dedicated this 1976 volume to a member of the imperial family, prince Takamatsu no miya Nobuhito (1905-1987), the third son of Taishō Tennō, whom he highly revered. Nothing shows the continuity of Kinoshita's work more than his dedication to the prince, which reads:

His imperial Highness
Prince Takamatsu Nobuhito
with highest reverence I take the liberty

14. In the years 1984 and 1986 two further parts of the work were published. Although they were officially counted as volumes 4 and 5 of Kinoshita's former work, (Kinoshita 1984 and 1986), but in fact these volumes, posthumously arranged by Manabe Daikaku, did not comprise of Kinoshita's lost commentary work but of various additional material, as astronomical tables and calendrical data.

to present the German translation of the *Kojiki*, volume three of the complete edition. Thanks to your benign courtesy I was finally able to accomplish the work. Kashii-gū, April 1976, Iwao Kinoshita.¹⁵

2. 1 Kinoshita's Biography

Kinoshita Iwao was, or still is, completely unknown to research in Japanese studies. Allow me to begin with some personal remarks in this context. I met Dr. Kinoshita more than thirty years ago, on July 23rd, 1977, which was about one year after the publication of his German translation of the *Kojiki*. As a young student of Japanese mythology, I visited him at his shrine near Fukuoka during a study tour through Japan. Having heard of his translation only shortly before, I wanted to see and talk to him, on the recommendation of Professor Nelly Naumann.¹⁶ We had an extraordinarily interesting conversation about several questions concerning the language and content of the *Kojiki*, and he presented me a copy of his translation as a gift, with an attached personal dedication. I still use this copy today. Unfortunately, we had no contact after this short visit, and only much later did I come to know of the death of Kinoshita Iwao in 1980, only a few years after he completed his life work.

Some years ago, Professor Wolfgang Michel of Kyūshū University, not knowing of my previous contact with Kinoshita Iwao, told me that he was in possession of some documents of the late Dr. Kinoshita. In November 2006 I met Professor Michel in his office in Fukuoka, and had the opportunity to look through some of this material. Professor Michel has done an extraordinary work collecting these documents and shedding some light onto the heretofore-unknown life of the scholar, priest and translator Kinoshita Iwao. I am very grateful for his generous support, and now we are planning a joint research project on the life and work of Kinoshita Iwao. As some of the material was already published by Yake Tatsuyuki, Ōba Takuya and Takeda Kōki from Kyūshū University (Yake et al. 2001), I shall give just a brief account of Kinoshita's life, with thanks to Professor Michel's permission to use his material.¹⁷

15. "Seiner Kaiserlichen Hoheit, Prinz Takamatsu Nobuhito, Erlaube ich mir ehrerbietigst die deutsche Übersetzung des *Kojiki*, Band III der Gesamtausgabe, zu überreichen. Dank Ihres mir gewährten gütigen Wohlwollens konnte ich die Arbeit beenden. Kashii-gū, April 1976, Iwao Kinoshita." ("Widmung", in: Kinoshita 1976)
16. It seems that Naumann was not very impressed by Kinoshita's work, since she never mentioned it again, not even among the existing translations of the source materials for mythological studies. (Cf. Naumann 1996: 22) In her letter of recommendation for my visit, Naumann stressed the importance of Kinoshita's translation for "students' use."
17. Many of the dates provided in this section derive from the prefaces of Kinoshita's work; without the valuable work done by Professor Michel and the research by Yake et al. (2001), this biographical sketch would not have been possible.

Kinoshita Iwao was born in Fukuoka on March 7th, 1894.¹⁸ His father, Kinoshita Yoshishige, was head priest of the same shrine where Kinoshita Iwao later served as *gūji*, Kashii-gū,¹⁹ near Fukuoka. In April 1909, the young Iwao entered middle school, graduating in March 1914. In September of the same year, he enrolled at the private university Kokugaku-in in Tokyo, graduating from the faculty of National Literature in July 1918. In September of the same year, Kinoshita enrolled at the faculty of Law at the private Nihon Daigaku. Although he returned to Kokugaku-in as a research student in April 1920, Kinoshita graduated from the Nihon University faculty of Law in March 1921. In March 1922 he graduated from the research school (*kenkyū-ka*) of Kokugaku-in University, and received in the same year an order to study abroad from the Institute of Imperial Classics of Kokugaku-in University. On August 22, 1922, Kinoshita embarked from the port of Yokohama and traveled to Europe. More than one year later, in October or December of 1923, he enrolled at the faculty of Philosophy at Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin, where he began to study the academic subjects of Philosophy, Sinology,²⁰ and History. This was the year that Kinoshita started his *Kojiki* translation project, which later became a part of his dissertation, using the *Kojiki* texts that he found in Berlin. The whole project was planned for seven volumes, which was to be printed at the famous academic publishing house DeGruyter.

In July 1929 Kinoshita finally graduated from the faculty of Philosophy at Berlin University. Following an initiative of the Japanese philosopher Kanokogi Kazunobu, in the same year the “German Japanese Society” (DJG) was founded in Berlin. Until 1932, this society published the academic journal *Yamato*,²¹ which was succeeded by the journal *Nippon*. In the 1929 edition of *Yamato*, Kinoshita (1929: 120-127) published an article on “primeval Shintō” (“Ur-Shintō”), which staked his place academically according to the standard of the time.²² On May 28th, 1929, the Japanese Embassy in Berlin announced that His Imperial Highness, prince Takamatsu no miya, would provide financial aid for the printing of the German translation of *Kojiki*.

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18. Yake et al. (2001: 1) provide two different dates: Meiji 37 (1904) and Meiji 27 (1894). From the context it becomes clear that 1894 must be regarded as the correct date.
19. The Kashii-gū is one of the Shintō shrines of national importance. There are worshiped the three Sumiyoshi deities as well as the legendary Empress Okinagatarashi-hime, alias Jingu Kōgo, her son Homuda-wake (the later Ōjin Tennō), and her husband Tarashi-naka-tsu-hiko, alias Chuai tennō, whose tomb also is located here.
20. In the same year, the famous Sinologist Otto Franke (1863-1946) had received a call to this university.
21. On the journal *Yamato* cf. Walravens 2000: 13.
22. He even states: „Jedenfalls kann als eine wichtige Tatsache festgestellt werden, daß der Ur-Shintō nicht als eine selbständige Religion anzunehmen ist, wie dies Motowori und Hirata tun.“ (Kinoshita 1929: 122)

But in August 1929, Kinoshita was ordered to return to Japan, arriving there on the 10th of September. He received an order to study the *Kojiki* again, financially aided by Kuroita Katsumi,²³ one of the main editors of the *Kokushi taikai* series.

In August 1933, Kinoshita presented a new Japanese edition of the *Kojiki*, which was incorporated into volume seven of this series in 1936.²⁴ In the same year, Kinoshita began his work on the *rōmaji* transcription as volume two of his *Kojiki* project, based on the *Kokushi taikai* text. In 1940, both volumes were printed on the occasion of the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of the empire,²⁵ with the Japanese text, being fully identical with the *Kokushi taikai* version, as part one (Kinoshita 1940a), containing various prefaces and addresses by well known persons of the era. The *rōmaji*-edition was printed as part two. (Kinoshita 1940b) But due to unknown reasons, the actual main body of the project, the third volume consisting of the German translation, was not published, probably because it was not yet finished in 1940. Unfortunately, the whole stock, as well as all the manuscripts and materials were burned during a fire bombing of Tokyo in 1944, so Kinoshita's project remained incomplete.

After the war, Kinoshita worked in several jobs, but finally became the *gūji* at his home shrine of Kashii-gū in 1959. In 1967, two German Japanologists from West Berlin, Hans Eckard and Johanna Fischer, visited Kinoshita in Fukuoka, offering help for the plan of a new translation. Hans Eckard (1905-1969), being one of the most problematic German Japanologists both before and after the war,²⁶ died in 1969, but with the help of other well known Japanologists, Kinoshita was finally able to finish his work, but unfortunately he completed only the translation, without any commentary or bibliographical sections. In 1975, the private printing of his *Kojiki* translation began, and the work was published in 1976 as part three of the original series. Four years later, on October 23rd, 1980, Kinoshita Iwao died at his home, the Kashii-gū near Fukuoka.²⁷

23. For Kuroita Katsumi cf. the recent study *Kuroita Katsumi and his state-sanctioned national history, 1896-1937: Narrating absolute imperial sovereignty and Japan's civilizing mission in Asia as history* by Lisa Yoshikawa (2007).

24. Kuroita Katsumi et al. (eds.) 1936.

25. Cf. Kinoshita's Preface to Kinoshita 1940a.

26. Before and during the war, Eckard seems to have been one of the German Japanologists supporting most fervently the axis between Germany and Japan. Nevertheless, after the war he became professor of Japanese Studies at the Free University of Berlin in 1964. This, among other events, caused an outburst of students' protests, leading to the "student revolution" of 1968 in West Berlin. Cf. Walravens 2000: 15.

27. Yake et al. (2001: 3) state that Kinoshita has died in the age of 87, but in regard to his lifespan the age of 86 seems correct.

2. 2 Kinoshita's *Kojiki* Volumes 1 to 3

As we can see from the biographical sketch above, Kinoshita's work was designed as more than the existing three volumes. Only the first and second volumes, which were printed in 1940, make special reference to the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese Empire, as can be seen in the introduction to volume one. The philosopher Kanokogi Kazunobu, being one of the most important individuals within the German Japanese relations of the 1930s and 40s, underwent an intellectual conversion from philosopher to ideologue, as did many other Japanese and German intellectuals of those days.²⁸ Although the project of translating the *Kojiki* had started as early as 1923, long before the coming of the dark days of fascist axis fantasies, by 1940 the *Kojiki* translation project obviously had become part of this ideological change.

Looking at these two volumes – the Japanese text and the *rōmaji* edition – one aspect becomes visible for the reader at first glance: in Kinoshita's and Kuroita's *Kokushi taikai* version, the *Kojiki* appears as almost a completely Japanese text. This is made visible by the *furigana* that run parallel to the Kanji scripture. Chinese characters in the *Kojiki* are not only transcribed, as has been done in all editions since Motoori Norinaga's philological reconstruction of the text, but it seems as if the editor(s) have composed a fully independent narrative in artificial archaic Japanese, running parallel to the textual body, thus creating another, separate text in contrast to the Chinese original. Thereby, the *Kojiki* text increasingly loses its original Kanji, or better Chinese form. This process of totally Japanizing the whole body of the text by deconstructing its Chinese appearance reaches its final stage in volume two, where the complete text is printed in phonetic *rōmaji* transcription only. In this volume, no visible trait of a basically Chinese writing of the narrative appears any longer, and the reader gets the impression of actually dealing with the original archaic Japanese narrative, written down in a phonetic style, thus neglecting any former Chinese (con-) text.

We probably do not do justice to Kinoshita Iwao's basic intentions with this interpretation of the *rōmaji* version, since in the 1920s he was a serious researcher, as we can see from his 1929 article in *Yamato*. So he could have intended his *rōmaji* volume as merely a kind of a friendly aid for the foreign reader, as this was his second volume of the whole translation project, which he wrote completely in *rōmaji* as well, including his introduction, the forewords, and so on. But in my view it does not seem an absurd interpretation to regard the importance of this phonetic transcript as going much beyond such purely pragmatic explanations. We know about the importance of reconstructing the allegedly archaic *kun* (i.e. Japanese)-reading of the *Kojiki* text since

28. Cf. Teruko Yoh (1999) on the ideological development of Kanokogi; cf. also Zentrum für Sprache und Kultur Japans (ed.) 2006.

Motoori Norinaga's monumental work *Kojiki-den*, in which he declared the Chinese characters constituting the text as actually being absolutely unimportant for its real meaning. (See part 4 of this study) As Norinaga stated, the Chinese "characters themselves are makeshift items which were simply attached to the text; what possible sort of deep reality could they represent?"²⁹ Ann Wehmeyer (1997: 10) points out in this context that in Norinaga's understanding, the Chinese characters were nothing more than "ornamentation," attached to the text by its compiler, Oho no Yasumaro.

With this statement we reach the core of our problem, in philological as well as ideological terms. The crucial question is whether there really existed an archaic narrative, which we can call the *Kojiki*, or whether this narrative was a mere construction of modernity, created by philologists up to Kinoshita Iwao following the legacy of Motoori Norinaga. Seen from this point of view, Kinoshita's 1940 *rōmaji* edition of the text assumes a new meaning, since it conforms with the anti-Chinese ideological paradigm of those days. Creating a purely "Japanese" text, without any hint to its Chinese implications, would fit exactly into such a matrix, which itself existed since the works of Motoori Norinaga and his fundamental critique of the "Chinese way of thinking," *karagokoro* 漢意. To solve all these questions we would have to go back first to the sources of the eighth century, to ask what really was written in these texts and then, in a second step, to look at Motoori Norinaga and his *Kojiki-den*, with his ideas about China and the Confucian way of seeing the world. Time and space are far too limited for dealing with these fundamental problems, therefore only some crucial points shall be mentioned here.

3. On the textuality of the *Kojiki*

In contrast to the *Nihon shoki*, the *Kojiki* itself provides material on the formation of the text, being absolutely invaluable for historical research.³⁰ This information is given in the "Foreword" by the *Kojiki*'s compiler, Oho no Yasumaro. His historical existence was finally proven by the accidental discovery of his grave on January 20th, 1979, which verified the *Shoku Nihongi*'s record on his death in the year 723.³¹ We may therefore regard Oho no Yasumaro as a historical figure and thus his "Foreword" as a trustworthy source as well.

29. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 145. Wehmeyer (1997: 14, n. 29) refers to the study of Kobayashi Yoshinori "The *Kun* Readings of the *Kojiki*" (in: *Acta Asiatica* Vol. 46, 1983).

30. The *Nihongi* just mentions under the date of Tenmu 29/3/16 a command to "writing a chronicle of the Emperors, and also of matters of high antiquity." But Aston (1975: 350, n. 2) interprets this as the command which "led ultimately to the compilation of the *Kojiki*," not the *Nihongi*.

31. Cf. the report "O no Yasumaro" (1979) in *Monumenta Nipponica* Vol. 34/2: 257.

In his foreword, the author, or compiler, or shall we say, the secretary of the text, informs the reader about his difficulties in writing down the narrative. As we now know, Tenmu Tennō had already ordered a certain person, whether male or female is still debated, of the Hieda-*uji* (clan), with the personal name of Are, to “learn,” or “memorize” (yomu 誦 よむ) the old traditions, because they were in danger of getting lost or interpreted “wrongly.”³² The text states, according to Chamberlain’s ((1883) 1982: 4) translation: “He was twenty-eight years old, and of so intelligent a disposition that he could repeat with his mouth whatever met his eyes, and record in his heart whatever struck his ears. Forthwith Are was commanded to learn by heart the genealogies of the emperors, and likewise the words of former ages.” But it took until the days of Empress Genmei that Hieda no Are’s record was actually written down. Yasumaro states that the Empress “commanded me Yasumaro to select and record the old words learnt by heart by Hiyeda no Are according to the Imperial Decree, and dutifully to lift them up to Her.” (Chamberlain (1883) 1982: 5)

Since Hirata Atsutane’s, and later Yanagita Kunio’s speculations, the gender of Hieda no Are has been a matter of dispute. In his essay “*Kojiki* as Literature,” Donald Keene (1983: 104 ff) discusses this point at length, giving some arguments that regard Hieda no Are as a woman, probably an early shaman in the tradition of the *sarume* ancestress. Keene (1983: 105) mentions Saigō Nobutsuna’s interpretation that “Are’s learning did not consist of reading the manuscripts but of reciting them with the proper intonation so as to retain their magical properties.” Although there is no final proof for the question of Hieda no Are’s gender, we arrive at the problem of Are’s “learning” at a crucial point in understanding the textuality of the *Kojiki* itself. As already stated, Kinoshita and his companions constructed a complete *kun*-version of the text in 1940, including even Oho no Yasumaro’s original Chinese foreword. As Keene (1983: 107) again mentions in this context, “the preface to the *Kojiki* by Oho no Yasumaro is almost ostentatious in its fluent use of Chinese rhetoric.” We know, for example, that even parts of the command by Emperor Tenmu, cited in the Foreword, were literally taken from a Tang document, dating from the year 653 and citing originally a command of the Chinese emperor Tai Zong. (Brownlee 1991: 10) Rendering such a wholly Chinese text in an allegedly archaic “pure Japanese” form comes close to the absurd. As Keene (1983: 107, n. 25) points out, this is proof “(if proof were needed) that it is possible to translate almost *any* Chinese text into ancient Japanese.”

32. 令誦-習帝皇日繼及先代舊辭 / 阿禮に勅語して / 帝皇日繼 (すめらみことのひつぎ) 及び / 先代舊辭 (さきつよのふること) を / 誦 (よ) み習はしめたまひき。 (NKBT 1: 46-47).

So, the main question remains: what did Hieda no Are actually “learn”? As Yasumaro cites the command of emperor Tenmu,³³ obviously written documents as sources did exist, which are described as *teiki* (“Imperial Chronicles”), and *honji* (“Fundamental Dicta”), apparently interchangeable with *kuji* (“Old Matters”), which were also mentioned.³⁴ Robert Ellwood (1973: 498) leaves this question open when declaring: “These chronicles of the imperial line and national events are lost, or were never other than oral tradition.” If we look at the actual text of the Foreword, it remains unclear whether Hieda no Are has simply learned and memorized these texts, which of course must have been written in Chinese characters too, or if he/she, as the female shaman theory says, chanted magical words coming from the oral tradition of the remote past. Yasumaro describes the enormous problems he faced when writing down Hieda no Are’s recital,³⁵ and decided not to produce an ordinary text in Chinese, despite being very well versed in this style of writing, as his Foreword proves, but to instead use a mixed form of phonetic and semantic usage of Chinese characters. So, finally it re-mains unclear up to this very day if the *Kojiki* text is mainly based upon on earlier written sources, which would have been previously laid down in Chinese, and were “learned” by Hieda no Are, or based on oral tradition, simply having been “memorized” by him or her, probably with the aid of those sources. On the basis of available source material this question can no longer be solved. But we can realize that this very problem marks the starting point for the controversy in modern times around the *Kojiki* as the allegedly first Japanese holy scripture.

33. “Hereupon the Heavenly Sovereign commanded, saying: ‘I hear that the chronicles of the emperors and likewise the original words in the possession of the various families deviate from exact truth, and are mostly amplified by empty falsehoods. If at the present time these imperfections be not amended, ere many years shall have elapsed, the purport of this, the great basis of the country, the grand foundation of the monarchy, will be destroyed. So now I desire to have the chronicles of the emperors selected and recorded, and the old words examined and ascertained, falsehoods being erased and the truth determined, in order to transmit [the latter] to after ages.’” (Chamberlain 1883 (1982): 3-4)

34. Philippi 1968 (1992): 41; cf. Keene 1983: 103, n. 9.

35. “In reverent obedience to the contents of the Decree, I have made a careful choice. But in high antiquity both speech and thought were so simple, that it would be difficult to arrange phrases and compose periods in the characters. To relate everything in an ideographic transcription would entail an inadequate expression of the meaning; to write altogether according to the phonetic method would make the story of events unduly lengthy. For this reason have I sometimes in the same sentence used the phonetic [12] and ideographic systems conjointly, and have sometimes in one matter used the ideographic record exclusively. Moreover where the drift of the words was obscure, I have by comments elucidated their signification; but need it be said that I have nowhere commented on what was easy?” (Chamberlain 1883 (1982): 5)

4. Reading the Kojiki: Motoori Norinaga

As is very well known, the question of language marks Motoori Norinaga's intellectual focus interpreting the *Kojiki* more than a thousand years after it was written down. During the Heian and medieval periods, it was the *Nihongi* that had served as the authoritative source for the Japanese past. This work fits much better to the expectations of the times by presenting an imperial history of an adequate standard by comparison to official Chinese sources. The *Nihongi* was completely written in Chinese, in contrast to the *Kojiki*'s mixed style, which had become quite unreadable even shortly after its compilation. It was the Edo period nativists, starting with Kada no Azumamaro (1706-1751) and Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769),³⁶ who (re-)discovered the forgotten predecessor of the *Nihongi* in accordance with their project of founding a genuinely national philology. It was Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) who finally devoted himself to this work, the *Kojiki*.

4.1 Karagokoro – the “Evil Chinese Spirit” and Japanese Nativism

The motivation behind the special philological work of *kokugaku* in general and Norinaga in particular was to prove the supremacy of the Japanese tradition against the Chinese, especially the Confucian history of ideas. Ironically, the methodology employed in *kokugaku* arguments against Confucianism was based on the very categories and axioms of Confucian thought. Classical Chinese Confucianism denies the idea of progress in history, positing an image of an idealized antiquity, a Golden Age at the dawn of history that contrasted sharply with a degenerated present. The Japanese nativist scholars (*kokugaku-sha*) borrowed this Confucian notion of an idealized antiquity, adapted it to Japan, and imagined a model for a better Japanese future.

36. Years before Motoori Norinaga's work *Kojiki-den*, Mabuchi had presented studies on the *Kojiki*, for example *Kojiki waka-ryakuchin* (...) and *Kojiki shindai* (...). In his introduction to the *Kojiki* Philippi mentions that: (a) The first printed edition of the *Kojiki* was in 1644. (b) The second edition, annotated by Watarai Nobuyoshi (1615-1690) (cf. Antoni 1998: 81), was published in 1687. (c) Arai Haruseki (1657-1725) was "the first to recognize the independent value of the *Kojiki*" (d) Kada no Azumamaro (1657-1725) and Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769) both produced annotated editions of the *Kojiki*. (e) Motoori was a disciple of Mabuchi since their meeting in 1763. (f) Motoori's *Kojiki-den* was written between 1764 and 1798. (g) Publication was only completed in 1822, after Motoori's death. (Cf. a posting by "Avi Gold, <altin_1@yahoo.com>", [shintoML] „Motoori and pre-Motoori reading of *Kojiki*“, date: 31. March, 2005; cf. Philippi 1968)

Kokugaku-sha like Kamo no Mabuchi and his successor Motoori Norinaga devoted themselves to rescuing Japanese antiquity from its subsequent alleged “contamination” by alien Chinese influences. They therefore endeavored philologically to access nearly incomprehensible archaic writings that contained the true “facts” of the Japanese past. The songs of the *Manyō-shū* (“Ten Thousand Leaf Collection”) of the eighth century became objects of great concern. Mabuchi made the interpretation of this lyric poetry, which was drawn up in old Japanese and written down phonetically in Chinese characters, a major part of his life’s work. He expected these poems to express the archaic Japanese mind purely, free of Chinese influence, and therefore to reflect the spirit of the Golden Age at the beginning of Japanese history. Philology was thereby not only a method, but also itself the object of the effort. The pure Japanese language without any Chinese “pollution” which seemed to glow across the centuries from the archaic literature of the *Manyō-shū* and other documents offered, in the view of the *kokugaku-sha*, the only access to the golden age of antiquity.³⁷

Norinaga to some degree politicized the *kokugaku* discourse, although he did not adopt a stance as fanatical as that which Hirata Atsutane and his school would develop in the nineteenth century. Norinaga did not consider the *Manyō-shū* as the most important document of antiquity, but the *Kojiki*. In his eyes, the myths as well as the reports on the early emperors of the *Kojiki* – which he textually mastered in a philological effort that lasted for decades – were texts about real beginnings from the period before any corrupting influence entered Japan from abroad. The narrative of the *Kojiki* led Norinaga to propose the idea of a Japan-centric “primeval revelation” and convinced him of Japanese superiority over China.

Norinaga focused his fundamental criticism of China on Confucianism, as can be seen from his essay *Naobi no mitama*, a part of his masterpiece *Kojiki-den*. In contrast, he believed that truth could be derived only from the *Kojiki*, its mythological reports about the era of divinities and the first imperial rulers of the land. In his view, the creation of the world as described in the *Kojiki* myths expressed the closeness between the archaic Japanese and their indigenous divinities, a unity the people of the outside world, especially the Chinese, lacked. According to Norinaga’s view, in China, separated from the original divine truth of the Japanese *kami*, it becomes necessary for men to create a philosophy like Confucianism. As the “godless Chinese” did not follow any longer the divine way of virtue intuitively, they had to devise a cleverly invented system of moral norms to control negative human tendencies. Norinaga’s criticism of Confucianism originally concentrated on the limited nature of all rationalistic worldviews, but soon developed into a xenophobic outcry against China.

37. It should be noted here that parallels between the ideas of the *kokugaku* and German Romanticism of the 18th and 19th centuries are obvious and worthy of further systematic study.

The term *karagokoro*, “Chinese spirit” or “Chinese heart,” summed it all up. This word encapsulated his view of human error and depravity as manifest in Chinese history. Thus, by the beginning of modern Japan in the Meiji period, a Japan-centric view of the world, based on the *kokugaku* teachings, was established. In Norinaga’s thinking, Confucian rationalism was a consequence of China falling away from the divine truth kept in the *Kojiki*.

4.2 The *Kojiki-den*

At the center of Norinaga’s scholarship stands his monumental work on the *Kojiki*, the *Kojiki-den*. As already pointed out, Norinaga had adopted philological methods from Confucianism in spite of his fundamental critique of Chinese thinking (*karagokoro*). Therefore, Confucianism may bear indirect responsibility for the appearance of the nativist national learning schools, since the concept of an idealized past is common to all schools of Confucianism. The Confucian philosopher Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) and the “Classical School” (*kogaku*) of Edo Confucianism in particular had a deep impact on nativist thinking. Referring to the works of Maruyama Masao, J. Victor Koschmann (1987: 39) points out that “Ogyū Sorai’s rejection of Sung neo-Confucianism in favor of a fundamentalist insistence on direct readings of the Chinese classics was extended by the eighteenth-century nativists like Motoori Norinaga to a renewed interest in Japanese mythohistories, particularly the *Kojiki* (Record of ancient matters).” Ann Wehmeyer states in regards to Norinaga’s borrowings from Ogyū Sorai: “Motoori appears to have written down Ogyū’s theories and studied them ... In his view, the ‘words’ represented the actual ‘facts’ of the way of the Sages. The same notion that facts or events (*kotogara*) may be revealed through language (*kotoba*) is stated.”³⁸ In general, nativist thinking was highly motivated by the conviction that “historical ‘fact’ may be revealed through the archaic ‘word’” (Wehmeyer 1997: 8), as Norinaga’s axiomatic conviction of the *Kojiki*’s Chinese characters as being nothing more than “ornamentations” to archaic word definitely states. Only the Japanese words contain truth, not the Chinese characters. And only by declaring the *Kojiki* as a whole to be a purely Japanese narrative may this truth of the words be revealed.

Norinaga mentions in the first book of his *Kojiki-den* that “... in the *Kojiki* meaning, event, and word are in accord with one another, and what is represented there is the true nature of ancient age.”³⁹ So he comes to the only consequent solution in his eyes when declaring: “I have determined, therefore, that in the *Kojiki*, we have the best work (史典 *humi*) among the ancient works, and that the *Nihonshoki* should

38. Wehmeyer 1997: 3; unfortunately there are many misprints in Wehmeyer’s text; on p. 3, for example, she confuses the years 1751 and 1851 three times.

39. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 6, row 10-11), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 22.

be placed secondary in importance after the *Kojiki*.⁴⁰ From his comments it becomes apparent that his *kun*-readings of the *Kojiki* script should not be taken too literally, since Norinaga does not try to find a correct “reading” for the Chinese characters of the text, but more or less intuitively seeks an archaic wording adequate to the script:

...Therefore, if one is to read the text in ancient Japanese which is true to form and meaning, the only choice is not to stick too literally to the style and the characters, but rather to assign a reading based on the language of the *Kojiki* and the *Manyōshū* after one has thought carefully about the general sense of the passage as a whole.⁴¹

But even Norinaga cannot manipulate the textual facts completely and has to admit that “all of the sentences of the *Kojiki* are written in the style of classical Chinese.”⁴² His solution for this obvious problem seems quite an elegant and lofty one. He simply declares that “the compiler (Oho no Yasumaro) did not direct much attention to classical Chinese,”⁴³ which is a remarkable argument when taking into account the fact that Oho no Yasumaro’s foreword was coined after Chinese models, as we have seen above. Speculating about Yasumaro’s intentions, Norinaga remarks “... we can see that his true desire must have been to write it all down in syllabic script.”⁴⁴ On Hieda no Are’s memory, Norinaga declares: “The Emperor (then) commanded directly a person named Fiyeda no Are to recite the Sumera-mikoto no hitsugi (The Imperial Sun Lineage) and the Saki no yo no furukoto and commit them to memory ...”⁴⁵ Consequently, Norinaga states on the textual body written down by Yasumaro: “... the reason why he is to record the Kuji which Are recited by imperial command is because the language of antiquity was viewed as essential.”⁴⁶

Here we have found the link between Norinaga the ideologist and Norinaga the philologist. He nearly shouts out when giving advice to the reader of the *Kojiki*: “... read the text seeking the pure language of antiquity, without any contamination by the Chinese style!”⁴⁷ This is the Norinaga we know from his karagokoro pamphlets, and here lies his motivation to declare the *Kojiki* a text of purely Japanese origin and language. Norinaga elsewhere elucidates his concept of *mono no aware* (物の哀れ, “the empathy for things”) and the intuitive character of Japanese understanding

40. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 7, row 8-9), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 24.

41. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 14, row 3), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 48.

42. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 17, row 4), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 75.

43. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 19, row 2), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 79.

44. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 19, row 7), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 80.

45. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 31, row 3), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 141.

46. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 31, row 8-9), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 142.

47. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 32, row 18-19), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 145.

of the world. So we are not surprised when finally reading his advice for a correct understanding of the *Kojiki*'s language – in the sense of an archaic Japanese narrative – that he declares: "... one must determine the *teniwoha* through intuition."⁴⁸

This is the very core and main essence of Norinaga's teaching about the *Kojiki*: the real facts are hidden in the words, and the ancient words in the last consequence can only be grasped by intuition. This clearly reveals that the *kun*-readings of the *Kojiki* are not meant as philologically and historically correct readings of the eighth century Kanji text corpus, but more as a kind of separate, nearly independent narrative, running parallel to the existing body of the text. And this separate *kun*-narrative rests mainly on the intuitive speculations of philologists who imagine they know the ancient words. The historian Kōnoshi Takamitsu (2000: 62) too sees the core of Motoori Norinaga's thinking in "what he saw as the exclusive purity of primeval Japan, most particularly in the 'ancient words' (*furukoto*) that had been spoken by the Japanese. This position required the expunging of all elements of the Chinese language, including the obfuscating veil of written characters and literary conventions." "Language becomes the basis for canonizing the *Kojiki*..." The world Norinaga envisions is the world of *sumera mikuni* ("land of the emperor"), "it is a world identified by allegiance to the emperor and by opposing to outside lands, most specifically China." (Kōnoshi 2000: 64)

5. Patterns of Ideology - kokutai

With this statement we finally reach the sphere of modern ideology. Japan's transformation into a nation state in the modern sense, in accordance with nineteenth century European concepts of state, would scarcely have been possible without the intellectual and ideological work and actions of imperial loyalists from the Tokugawa period. It is thus not surprising that the spiritual substance and objectives of these early nationalist schools were also handed down and propagated in the increasingly strong Japanese nationalism of the Meiji period and later. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, xenophobic Shintō was declared a "supra-religious" state cult in which every citizen had to participate, no matter what his or her personal credo might be. The process of national unification centered on the imperial institution.

The view of the emperor's position, which the nationalists declared to be unique and incomparable, was based on the mythical traditions of antiquity, as handed down in the *Kojiki*, and in part the *Nihon shoki* as well. This concept, propagated as a state ideology, reached its pinnacle when being promoted as a singular and unique *kokutai* ("national essence") which distinguished Japan from all other nations. In domestic politics, this *kokutai* ideology provided a means for forging a unified folk state out

48. *Kojiki-den* 1 (MNZ 9, 1976: 37, row 5-6), cf. Wehmeyer 1997: 156. *Teniwoha* are the *joshi* 助詞, uninflected „postpositions“, in modern grammatical terminology.

of a heterogeneous populace. On the surface, the postulation of a homogeneous nation was intended to frighten off internal or external potential opponents as well as create the basis for the expansionist claims of the new Japanese empire in Asia. The ideological goal of unification was the creation of a Japanese "family state" concept. It related all its citizens, or at least its subjects, to one another on a kinship basis, then projected this mystical, mythical community onto the figure of the emperor as the father of the national extended family. Later he would become the father of all nations.

In the center of this ideological pattern stood the idea of the sacredness of the Japanese nation and her imperial house. The writings on the creation of the Japanese empire, recorded in the oldest written records of the country from the early eighth century, according to Norinaga's legacy, the *Kojiki* in particular, were regarded within this ideological sphere as historical facts. Accordingly, the sun goddess Amaterasu, ancestral deity of the imperial house, entrusted rule over the country for all eternity to her descendants, the emperors, constituting one legitimate lineage, interestingly in a decree (*shinchoku* 神勅, "Heavenly Order") which can be found in the *Nihon shoki* only, not in the *Kojiki*.⁴⁹ It can be seen that the basis for the ideological developments in Japan during the early Shōwa period had been basically laid down already during the Edo period. The leading scholar Motoori Norinaga (1976b: 49) proclaimed as early as 1771: "Japan is the native country of our august ancestral deity Amaterasu-ōmikami. It appears clearly from it the reason for Japan's superiority before all other countries. There is no other country that does not experiences the power of this noble goddess." Kōnoshi Takamitsu stresses the importance of Motoori Norinaga's *Kojiki* studies for the emergence of the modern nation state in Japan: "But it would be a mistake," he points out, "to see Norinaga's opinions as the basis for the canonization of the *Kojiki* in the modern period. Instead, it was the modern's state's need for a national canon that caused it to discover Norinaga." (Kōnoshi 2000: 64)

As is well known in the history of the modern world, the idea of the nation state puts high value on the question of a particular national language. In this context, Kōnoshi quotes Ueda Kazutoshi's famous lecture dating from 1894, *Kokugo to Kokka to* ("National Language and the Nation"), "which stated that the nation-state needs to be founded on a common language." (Kōnoshi 2000: 64) By the way, this is a position very well known in the writings of the Romantic School, especially in Germany.

49. The *shinchoku* is recorded in the *Nihongi* (NKBT 67: 147; Aston 1956: 76 f), *Kojiki* (NKBT 1: 126/127) and *Kogo-shūi* (*Gunsho ruijū* 25: 5; Florenz 1919: 246), but only one version, a variant of the *Nihon shoki*, reports a command for eternal rule through the imperial lineage; all others just speak of a direct command to the "Heavenly Grandchild," *Ninigi no mikoto*. Cf. Antoni 1998: 75.

Let us quote Kōnoshi (2000: 65) again, who brings this whole process to the point:

It was in this context that the *wabun* (vernacular)-centered corpus of Japanese ‘classics’ was constructed and that the *Kojiki* assumed a privileged status over the *Nihon shoki* as a national classic and as the repository of the oldest and most ancient folk tradition.

Parallel to this occurred the canonization of the *Manyō-shū* as a “national poetry anthology.”⁵⁰ Kōnoshi (2000: 66) elucidates the idea of the *kokutai* and the importance of Amaterasu’s “Divine Decree (*shinchoku* 神勅)” in this context, but does not solve an intriguing detail problem: why is the crucial decree for eternal rule over the land of Japan to be found in the *Nihon shoki* only, and not in the *Kojiki*? Both texts together constitute the modern Japanese canon of idealized antiquity. But, as we have seen, it was the *Kojiki* that, since the historic “decision” of Motoori Norinaga, was regarded first in rank among these twins.⁵¹

5. 1 Kinoshita’s *Kojiki* again

What does all this mean for our understanding of the text? What does it mean for the text as a whole? Does there really exist a *Kojiki* prior to Norinaga’s poetical work of (re-)constructing an ancient narrative? Do we have to go back to Yasumaro’s plain Chinese script to understand the “real” *Kojiki*? But would this really do justice to the text, since the *Kojiki* became famous and important as a holy scripture of Shintō in modernity only because of Norinaga and companions declaring it authentic and rendering it into an ancient and sacred Japanese narrative? These are serious questions, and I have to confess that there has been no satisfactory answer until now. We only can determine that the *Kojiki* reached its important status in modernity because of its image as the most ancient narrative of Japanese language. The fact that the archaic Japanese words in this text themselves are philological (re-)constructions by scholars of *kokugaku* tradition since the days of Motoori Norinaga is well known, but this did not really affect the analysis in the sense of a fundamental textual critique up to now. We still work with all those editions of the text, whether it be the NKBT, NKTZ or even KST editions, and we still believe that the archaic Japanese words given there are more or less correct readings of Yasumaro’s script, reflecting what Hieda no Are had dictated him in those four months of intensive joint work between November 711 and March 712.

50. See the important study by Shinada Yoshikazu (2000).

51. On reading the *Kojiki* see also the new publication by Kōnoshi Takamitsu (2007).

5. 2 Translations

For us as non-Japanese readers of the text, one additional important question in this context arises: What do we have to translate when reading the *Kojiki*? Shall we rest upon Motoori's and his successors' textual reconstructions, despite our knowledge of the textual history, or should we follow a textual purism, just translating what was handed down through the centuries, which would be a "*Kojiki* prior to Norinaga?" As is well known, all of the existing translations of the work rest upon the philological work of the *kokugaku*. Starting with Basil Hall Chamberlain's masterpiece of translation from as early as 1883 (reprinted in 1982), through Karl Florenz' partial translation (1919) to Donald Philippi's new translation from 1968 (reprinted 1992), all of the works rest upon editions in the heritage of Norinaga's narrative. As a consequence, they translated a Japanese work from the late 18th and early 19th century called *Kojiki*, having been written by an author named Motoori Norinaga after the model of an ancient text.

As I discussed in the beginning of this paper, Kinoshita Iwao's translation seems to be of extraordinary importance in this context. Before translating the work, he had even created his own version of the allegedly original wording of the text, since when it has been known and used as the *Kokushi taikai*-edition of the *Kojiki*. (Kuroita et al. 1936) Kinoshita even undertook the final step in the legacy of Motoori Norinaga's advice on handling the text by creating a purely phonetic version of the narrative. Kinoshita's *rōmaji*-version of the text can, in my opinion, therefore be regarded as the most radical construct of an imagined purely Japanese script, decontaminating any Chinese aspect of the text, and thus fulfilling Norinaga's program of philology and ideology, especially his condemnation of *karagokoro*, to the extreme. The fact that such a behavior would have been in deepest accordance with the fanatic anti-Chinese ideological patterns of wartime Japan, and especially the commemoration of the alleged founding of the Japanese Empire 2,600 years ago in 1940, fits perfectly into the ideological matrix of those dark days.

6. *Kojiki* – the Holy Book of Shintō?

Let us finally return to the most difficult problem within this context: Must the *Kojiki* be regarded as a, or even the, "Holy Book of Shintō"? This question deserves a full-scale study on its own, therefore only a few arguments can be discussed here. Marco Frenschkowski (2007: 33) states that holy texts are frequently the oldest written sources we know from a certain culture. In the preface to his study on understanding "texts as sources" in comparative religious history, its author, Kurt Rudolph (1988), discusses at length the methodology of research on holy texts of world religions. He points out that in many cases holy scriptures are based on earlier, orally transmitted narratives. (Rudolph 1988: 44) A central point in his

argumentation is, as he says, the “old struggle” between the two antagonistic methods, the approaches by literary studies and by studies of religious history, which has dialectally faded away, giving room to work in concert. (Rudolph 1988: 50) This is true for *Kojiki* studies as well. In his essay “The *Kojiki* as Literature,” Donald Keene (1983: 99) makes some extraordinary remarks on the religious functions of the *Kojiki* in modern times:

The *Kojiki* is of great importance in the history of Japanese culture not only because of its antiquity but because it has served, especially since the eighteenth century, as the sacred book of the Shinto religion, and because it is our best source of information about the beliefs of the Japanese at the dawn of their civilization.

In his study on Motoori Norinaga and the creation myths of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, Isomae Jun’ichi points at the progress of publishing technology during the early Edo period in this respect⁵² and adds a new and fascinating aspect to the discussion, arguing that the *Nihongi* had articulated the world views of the ruling classes, whereas Motoori Norinaga’s *Kojiki* stood in accordance with the ordinary folk’s view of the world.

The Chinese style of the *Nihon shoki* was the symbol of the Chinese educationalism of the ruling classes represented by Confucian studies... 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. (Isomae 2000: 33)

With this argumentation, the *Kojiki* becomes a mere product of an individual, Motoori Norinaga’s, interpretation of the “original past,” based on his concept of *mono no aware* and the culture of the non-ruling classes. (Isomae 2000: 32) Isomae, by pointing out “the contemporaneity” of interpretation of texts, therefore questions the interpreter’s general “search for an original past.” (Isomae 2000: 34)

In any case, we may conclude that there would be no *Kojiki* as a sacred book for Shintō in general or for the non-ruling classes since the Edo period in particular, without the philological, and religiously motivated ideological work of Motoori Norinaga. His main motivation clearly can be seen in his rejection of everything Chinese, his fundamental and more and more fanatic hatred of the *karagokoro*. As

52. “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. (...) 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. (...) 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.” (Isomae 2000: 29).

it was true for the German Romanticists of the same age, astonishingly without any visible relationship between the two intellectual worlds, in the center of this nativist project stood the concept of the national language. Motoori found his archaic and “pure” Japanese in the narrative of the *Kojiki*, and he made this the basis of a whole worldview. State Shintō as well as Imperial Shintō up to this very day could never have existed without his declaring the *Kojiki* to be the central text *and* narrative of the Japanese canon.

Kinoshita Iwao, with his 1940 edition of the text, stood in the tradition of this project, although critical research since the days of Chamberlain, Aston and Florenz, as well as Tsuda Sōkichi,⁵³ had already and unmistakably pointed to the historical facts. So the story of the *Kojiki* as a holy text is not only the story of religious content, as our best “source of information about the beliefs of the Japanese at the dawn of their civilization,” as Donald Keene holds it, but is also the story of a text, its construction, interpretation, reception and translation. Textual critique has to stand at the beginning of our research, and without such a critical approach we are condemned just to believe what others have written down. Whether the *Kojiki* should be regarded under this point of view as a kind of “invented tradition” is an extremely complicated topic, since the text itself is, without any question, a very old one. But it is also true that the *Kojiki*'s impact is limited to Japan of the modern era, that is, since the early 19th century. This would account for an understanding of the text as an invented tradition, or, in the understanding of Dietmar Rothermund (1970), as a “traditionalistic” item. But I shall leave this discussion open here, since it would lead us into a new topic.

I would like to conclude with a very personal remark. In the first days of his stay in Matsue, Lafcadio Hearn was completely fascinated by the atmosphere of Izumo, the Land of the Gods, which existed mainly in his romantic fantasies. He went out with nothing else than Chamberlain's translation of the *Kojiki* as his personal guidebook to find all those mysterious places of high antiquity being told of in the archaic text.⁵⁴ Mainly through Hearn's uncritical romanticism did the image of this text as a holy book of the Japanese find its way to the Western reader. Without Hearn's fairy tale-like reports from Izumo, no Westerner probably would ever have heard about the *Kojiki*. And the attraction of this vision is unbroken even today, as we can see from the extreme popularity of Lafcadio Hearn's books. But if Hearn would have read not only the text of the *Kojiki* itself – if he ever really did – but the learned commentary of its translator and in those days still close personal friend, Basil Hall Chamberlain, he probably never would have constructed such a personal vision of a

53. On Tsuda's work regarding the *Kojiki* cf. Tsuda 1967; for the importance of early translators and Tsuda Sōkichi, see Naumann 1996: 18 ff.

54. Hearn 1997 (1894): 20, 172.

fairy world of ancient Japan in this way.⁵⁵ As we all know, enlightenment can destroy romanticism, and may lead to the destruction of dreams. This was, as I am convinced, what Lafcadio Hearn feared most, and what made him a unhappy cynic in the last years of his life. I personally can understand this in some way, since thirty years ago, in July 1977, as I mentioned above, I met Dr. Kinoshita at his Kashii-gū shrine, where he gave me his translation of the *Kojiki* as a personal gift. Directly after this meeting, I went with this book in my hands to Izumo, without ever having read, I have to confess, a word of Lafcadio Hearn's works, not knowing them. Although preparing for a doctoral thesis on Izumo mythology, I read Kinoshita's German translation of the *Kojiki*, which had no commentary at all, as a kind of romantic script, too, of course knowing quite well, from my studies with Nelly Naumann, about the historical facts. But the text itself, the stories of the Gods and the mythical places, had its own magic. So the *Kojiki* was literature for me too, and as such, it was open to the reader's emotions, dreams and interpretations. But for the sake of historical truth, in our understanding of the text, we should follow the path of the critical scholar Chamberlain, not that of his *alter ego*, the cynical romantic Lafcadio Hearn.

Abbreviations

KST: Kokushi taikai
 MNZ: Motoori Norinaga zenshū
 NKBT: Nihon koten bungaku taikai
 NKTZ: Nihon koten bungaku zenshū

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55. On the complicated relationship between Hearn and Chamberlain see Ota 1998; cf. Antoni 2005: 12-14. A short overview of Chamberlain's life is given by Harold Parlett (1935). Here, the author points out Chamberlain's extremely critical last essay on Japan by stating: "His last contribution in the field of Japanese knowledge was a small pamphlet entitled *The Invention of a New Religion*, an arresting essay but unpalatable to many Japanese." (Parlett 1935: 285) For a discussion of this essay see Antoni 1998: 296-299.

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