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Towards an Asian narrative of death — the Japanese case

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Abstract

An investigation of literary and narrative aspects of *Kojiki*, taking the sections concerned with Yamato Takeru as a case study. This study criticizes common readings of the Yamato Takeru story which apply contemporary reading strategies to ancient materials, taking Ivan Morris's *Nobility of Failure* as a typical example of misreading. A more appropriate reading strategy is constructed based on what is known of the processes by which *Kojiki* was produced as well as internal evidence. This strategy takes into account the narrative expectations present in the oral culture from which *Kojiki* took its episodes and the editorial purposes behind its compilation. The common image of Yamato Takeru as a tragic murderous and sentimental figure is shown not to be central to the *Kojiki* account, but rather the product of anachronistic misreading.

Introduction

General questions

As a starting point for an inquiry into presentations of death in Asian literature, the Japanese case is particularly interesting for its earliest manifestations represent two diametrically opposite approaches, one, *Kojiki*, self-consciously resistant of continental literary styles, and the other, *Nihon shoki*, designed to compete on foreign terms.¹ In this preliminary study I endeavor to clarify the narrative character of the sections of *Kojiki* dealing with Yamato Takeru, which gather together a number of adumbrations of later typical Japanese presentations of death. A later study contrasting similar material in *Nihon shoki* with Chinese historical narratives and a consideration of *Nihon ryōiki* in relation to Buddhist materials will provide the starting point for the larger project, of literary representations of death in Asia in general.

Kojiki is generally discussed in terms of folklore and mythology. Here I want to con-

sider more specifically literary questions about the stories that make up the Yamato Takeru sequence: what expectations in their readers they engaged with, and why did they end up taking the organizational form that they did. This paper is limited by the fact that this is a new area of research for me. I welcome comments from those many scholars whose experience of these materials is far greater than mine.

Nowadays, in the West at least, the study of literature invariably ends up being the study of some other discipline in relation to literature. Thus the most recent English language study of *Man'yōshū* death poems treats them as part of a cultural management of the politics of succession.² It might be thought that this is simply a reflection of "New Historicism," that is, the recognition of the importance of historical context in the study of literature. But apart from such positive reasons for the emphasis on politics, patronage networks, the position of women in society, anthropological perspectives and

1. See Pollack.

2. Ebersole.

so on, in studies of literature, there are also negative reasons, that is, a loss of confidence in purely literary questions, engendered by critiques of assumptions thought to lie behind older studies, often taking the form of reader-response theory, the death of the author or other radical questioning of the process by which literary works are produced. Primarily such critiques constitute a welcome rejection of an elitism among academics, who at one time assumed they could adjudicate the relative worth of literary works and legislate their correct meanings. Frequently their pronouncements depended on a separation of art (or literature) from the judgments of ordinary people, and was discussed in terms of an increasingly inaccessible language—citations from Latin and Greek and so on. In the present time, literary theorists, whose primary impulse is to oppose such elitism, have ended up doing something similar, again taking the study of literature out of reach of ordinary language and readers, reserving it to a priesthood of academics with their own impenetrable language and specialist works.

The questions I have in mind, revolve around the pleasure principle in literature. The stories that make up a work like *Kojiki* survived in oral culture, at least in part, because they entertained or otherwise deeply interested their listeners. So what was it in those stories that entertained, and how? The intellectual trends (in the west) that discourage discussion of such issues amount to little more than certain simplistic arguments about the location of the meaning of texts—are they in the texts themselves or are they created in their readers—and some moral posturing about the relation of authorial intention to the effectiveness of works. In the case of the first, this is a non-question. The meaning of a text is not located anywhere. The problem lies in the verb “to mean.” It has a linguistic significance—to refer to

something, a personal significance related to the will—to genuinely intend to express, and finally an evaluative significance—to be of a certain degree of importance. By saying that the meaning of a text is dependent on the reader, and that the reader creatively generates its meaning, we conflate the fact that there are obvious misreadings (ie when one word is, for example, misunderstood for another) and the fact that any story may have a particular relevance to or associations for a given individual. This should not prevent us asking what a story means in a literal sense. Again, the problem of authorship and authorial intention is like the question of nature and evolution; if we say the lion is designed to live in the African pampas, that is not to assert a designer whose intentions are privileged, but rather that there is a fit between the creature’s structure and an environment to which it is suited. Similarly we might wish to say that a story is observably designed to be read in a certain way, without indicating a conscious intent on the part of an author. The survival of a family of stories with particular characteristics implies that they were at one time suited to a particular kind of reading, a particular set of reading expectations and strategies. I believe we can venture intelligent remarks on what these were in the case of the narratives that make up *Kojiki*, and also that we should, because such questions are, ultimately, the proper province of literary study.

Kojiki

Kojiki is an important starting point for an investigation of Japanese narrative. It is not only the oldest extant Japanese literary work, it preserves more closely than any other work a primary oral Japanese narrative as it might have existed before the introduction of Chinese writings to Japan. It is of course written wholly in Chinese characters. The question of the language in which it was

originally read is not easy to answer. The preface is written in Chinese and the poems (or songs) are written in a kind of *man'yō-gana*, to be read phonetically as Japanese. The remainder is in a *hentai kanbun* accompanied by notes on Japanese pronunciation. Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) believed it to represent a pure Japanese language, free of Chinese words, and, as any ancient tradition of reading the text was lost by his time, he reconstructed such a reading. The reading presented in his commentary *Kojikiden* (completed in 1798) is the basis of modern readings. Chamberlain thinks it unlikely that in the eighth century it was read without any Chinese elements, but on the other hand, it is clear that it preserves many elements of archaic Japanese that were shortly to disappear in the “classical” period.³

Not only did Motoori see *Kojiki* as a record of a pure Japanese language, he also believed it to represent an integral literary work with a single ancient Japanese communal viewpoint. This is harder to sustain. In the first place, the introduction describes a process of compilation which would make a single viewpoint unlikely. The emperor Temmu had certain chronicles and traditions held in different families “corrected” and then memorized by a retainer, Hieda no Are. Several years later the author of the preface, Ō no Yasumaro, again selected sections from what Are remembered and wrote them down. The result was *Kojiki*. It seems there was some kind of committee active between Temmu and Are which selected from contradictory traditions, some written and some oral, and organized them more or less to look like a consistent narrative. Again it seems likely that Yasumaro applied his own viewpoint in his selection and recording, which being in a different reign probably was not

the same as that of the previous compilers. Some such process is supported by internal evidence. Scholars have conjectured a complex series of stages for the construction of the final narrative out of older elements. It is not clear how firmly based the various theories are, but many postwar scholars would agree with the assessment that *Kojiki* is a patchwork of “multiple heterogeneous mythologies” that later were combined and read as imperial mythology.⁴ It is striking that Yasumaro’s description of the process by which *Kojiki* was put together is explicit about its political motives. Nowadays it is commonplace to look for hidden connections between literary works and the power structure in which they are produced, but here Temmu makes it plain that he sees the authority of his own institution to depend on the establishment of an appropriate version of history. In other words *Kojiki* is ideological, carefully compiled to legitimate the position of the imperial lineage.

These various aspects of the work, its combination of selected oral and written materials, their weaving together into one integrated historical narrative, the construction out of them of an ideology to support the power of the imperial court, and multiple stages of compilation reflecting different historical conditions, are all visible internally in the text. From the point of view of the investigation of narrative, it is clear that the fundamental building blocks of the text are short anecdotes or tales of oral origin, selected from a larger tradition of families of stories (much like one finds, for example, in collections of oral tales all over the world). These are stitched together by more or less short passages of text with a variety of intentions as well as insertions and modifications. There is some attempt to gather these

3. Chamberlain (xiv-xvi).

4. The analysis of stages of constructing the various narratives (Sunairi) give the impression of being based on intuition and hunches. See Kōnoshi (51–67, 55).

stories into a longer and consistent narrative, but inconsistencies and lacunae are allowed to remain.⁵ When we ask then about the nature of the narrative in *Kojiki*, we are in fact asking two separate questions: how the older anecdotes of primarily oral origin lend themselves to be read, and to what different kind of readings were the compilation of them into the final work directed. Both of these will figure in our reading below.

We should here make some mention of *Nihon Shoki*. Although *Nihon Shoki* is believed to have been completed after *Kojiki*, the question of whether elements of one text predate elements of the other is a complex matter, as yet undecided. *Nihon Shoki* adopts a quite different world-view and narrative style from *Kojiki*. It is written in Chinese and frequently borrows phrases and even whole passages from Chinese works. In addition, it applies Chinese standards and expectations to many of its stories with the result that there is a visible tension within the work between its stance and material. Many of the stories told in the legendary and historical sections of *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, do not lend themselves to these Chinese influences. Thus from the point of view of narrative *Kojiki* is clearly closer to the older records and oral traditions on which it drew, regardless of the relative dates of the various stages in the compilation of the two works.⁶

Yamato Takeru

The story of Yamato Takeru is striking in the context of the history of Japanese literature in general, and in particular in relation to the question of the representation of death in that literature. It is, in the first place, the most continuous and complete narrative in *Kojiki*. It has been understood to represent an “essentially Japanese” type of

narrative and world-view. On the other hand it is also a particularly complex example of the patchwork nature of *Kojiki*. A number of separate tales with little inherent relationship to each other are gathered, partially modified and stitched together to make a total story to fit intentions relatively unconnected with the separate elements. The resulting sequence can be read as a catalog of representations of death, and is thus a particularly useful starting point for a discussion of the representation of death in Japanese literature. Death in fact is repeatedly used in the Yamato Takeru sequence of stories for narrative ends.

These descriptions of deaths adumbrate similar death scenes and literary uses of death found in the later Japanese tradition. While I do not intend to explore this aspect fully here, it is useful for our study to consider why such foreshadowing occurred. In general there are perhaps three types of reasons that are commonly advanced for the perceived persistence of narrative and sensibility in a literary tradition. The least controversial is to suppose that works in a tradition operate by alluding to and exploiting previous works, thus a development and persistence of forms and motifs is inevitable. The problem here is that *Kojiki*, in any case, was apparently little read in subsequent centuries. Moreover, to take a more general view, literary products (such as Noh plays) that are felt to be essentially Japanese in nature, regularly arose from uneducated populations into high culture, and therefore their contents cannot be explained as the result of the continuity of literate or high culture alone. Such objections support the next explanation, common today in Japan and formerly in the West, too, that such continuities derive rather from some kind of shared eth-

5 . Much research of *Kojiki* seeks to explain apparent inconsistencies, but the fact is inconsistency was tolerated.

6 . For example, various kinds of word-play and polysemy in particular are fundamental to the tales in *Kojiki* and are lost in *Nihon Shoki*. For discussion see Sakashita.

nic character or racial consciousness. Such beliefs underlie the work of scholars like Yanagita Kunio and Carmen Blacker. The association of this type of view with racist essentialism and the difficulty in imagining a scientific mechanism through which it operates makes it unacceptable in current educated circles.⁷ A third type of explanation, perhaps sometimes not clearly distinguished from the second, is that literate narratives arise out of a sea of oral narrative which flows back and forth in society at large. This oral tradition may have a persistence, arising from its intimate relation with the symbolic codes of society at large, the way in which a particular narrative relates to the construction of meaning in everyday life. It seems likely then that the truth lies somewhere in a combination of this and the first explanation.

In any case, to return to the particular material under consideration here, we are in search of the narrative principles underlying the Yamato Takeru sequence. It is particularly useful that we have the influential reading of the Yamato Takeru sections of both *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* of Ivan Morris, which make up the starting point of his book: *The Nobility of Failure*. Morris's reading is by no means eccentric. In fact much that he says can be found stated or implied in Japanese works. But it is on the other hand particularly clear that his reading is informed by expectations (in other words, reading strategies) that he brings from the European and American tradition (as well as being influenced by anachronistic aspects of the way the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* are commonly published in English and Japanese).⁸ My approach will be to start by inspecting Morris's reading for the strategies that he employs, and then turn to a closer look at the

sequence as it is actually presented in *Kojiki* and, by contextualizing it within the larger collection of narratives in that work, discuss the kind of reading strategies to which they are more suited in themselves.

Nobility of Failure and its roots in western reading strategies

To Morris, the sequence of anecdotes about Yamato Takeru found in *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* are versions of a story about a legendary figure. According to his account of that story, Yamato Takeru was a "poignant, lonely hero," who "started his career" by murdering his brother. His father, the emperor Keikō, had ordered him to reprimand his elder brother, and he did so in a display of extreme violence. Fourteen years later he himself died, "a melancholy, romantic figure who, having been defeated in his last battle had lost all desire to live." Between this beginning and end, Morris sees Yamato Takeru's life as divided into two stages: the first covering his beginnings as a "rough, fearless" lad, and his period of military success overcoming various backward groups of tribesmen, when his character is "marred by trickery and vindicativeness," and the second, when, fighting far from home, he gradually develops "gentle, poetic" qualities." Morris fills out this "career" with citations, from *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, to which he adds his own commentary, informative and mildly mocking.⁹

In the first stage of the story, Morris follows his account of Yamato Takeru's fratricide, with two stories of Yamato Takeru's defeat of rebellious groups through deception. The first tells of his murder of the Kumaso brothers, by attending one of their banquets disguised as a girl, and stabbing them while they are drunk, an exploit which

7. For a discussion of this issue in relation to Yanagita Kunio, see Koschmann et al.

8. Morris.

9. With remarks like: "The most remarkable feat credited to Emperor Keikō is his marriage to his own great-great-granddaughter" (Morris, 3).

brought him the title Yamato Takeru (the hero or warrior of Yamato). The second is the story of his pretence of friendship with Izumo Takeru and symbolic exchange of swords. This is the occasion when Yamato Takeru gives his counterpart in the land of Izumo, Izumo Takeru, a defective weapon which makes it easy for him subsequently to kill him. This successful trick is celebrated with a gloating song of triumph. Morris calls this deception a “remarkably unattractive ruse,” not merely as an expression of his own evaluation, but conjecturing a similar judgment from *Kojiki*’s own time (declaring that Yamato Takeru had “established a form of bond that is sacrosanct in any early society”). Morris completes his account of the first half of the cycle by telling how YT returns to court and is immediately dispatched to the eastern provinces to deal with another series of rebels.

Morris characterizes the shift from this first stage to the second in the following terms: “the callous, unprincipled bully gives way to a solitary, ill-starred wanderer who... is destined for defeat and early death.” His account of this second period does not proceed by citation, but rather summarizes later events, discussing in turn: the receipt of a spear or axe as the symbol of his new command, the visit to his aunt at the Ise shrine and receipt of sword and bag of mysterious contents, the use of these to escape the fire set to kill him on the plain in Sagami, the suicide of his “empress” Ototachibana to propitiate a sea deity while crossing by boat. Morris goes on to tell us of final encounters between Yamato Takeru and deities rather than human rebels: the white deer at which he throws a “clove of garlic” and the white boar on Mount Ibuki. Yamato Takeru is “mortally damaged by the supernatural fallout” of this last encounter, and with wobbly legs, supporting himself by a stick, keeping

awake by drinking “magic waters” pushes on to the Nobo plain in northern Ise, where he collapses and dies after “reciting a final series of nostalgic poems,” and sending a message to his father (here Morris cites *Nihon Shoki*): “My only regret is that I shall never again behold Your Majesty.”

As he recounts these events, Morris notes the evidence of a profound character change: after the suicide of Ototachibana, the former “unfeeling brute” is “profoundly moved by a woman’s self-sacrifice” and is “forever lamenting” her death. Morris illustrates this point by telling how Yamato Takeru climbed a mountain and, sighing three times, said “Alas, my wife [*A tsuma*],” thereby naming the eastern provinces “Azuma.” He closes his reading with a discussion of the fondness of Japanese military men for poetry, mentioning samurai and “*kamikaze* pilots,” and noting how the preponderance of Yamato Takeru’s poems in the second half of his life reflect a romantic, forlorn and homesick caste of mind.

This exposition of the life of Yamato Takeru probably represents very well, and in an amusing, informed and “modern” (i.e. mid-twentieth-century) fashion, the responses of many western readers of the related passages, particularly as they appear in the translations of *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki* available at in the time it was written.¹⁰ What are its main constituents?

In the first place Morris reads the sequence in terms of Yamato Takeru’s character and its development. Yamato Takeru’s character is not described directly in *Kojiki*; it never says: “YT was a person of type a, but as a result of experience b he became a person of type c.” Indeed *Kojiki* rarely describes character explicitly. But Morris is not inventing his reading out of thin air, rather he is interpreting the sequence of events in a particular way that seems quite natural to

10. I.e. Aston and Chamberlain.

him (and us). The events are not taken merely to be interesting in themselves, but in addition to have been selected specifically in order to illustrate Yamato Takeru's character at successive stages in his life. Thus the murder of his brother shows us that he is in early youth excessively violent and keen to avenge insults to his father, the entry into the Kumaso cave shows that he is brave, physically attractive and resourceful, the killing of Izumo Takeru that he is dishonest, callous and smug. These interpretations set up Morris's reading of the first stage. The turning point in Yamato Takeru's development is heralded by the sight of him crying and complaining to his aunt that his father wishes him to die. This rare expression of interiority, is felt to be a deliberate showing of Yamato Takeru's increasingly sensitive nature, and a foreshadowing of the new melancholy, reflective and sensitive person into which he develops. Subsequent events are less graphically violent than earlier ones, appearing rather to be elements in a mystical and emotional trial. Yamato Takeru's increased sensitivity is evidenced by his being, according to Morris, deeply moved by, and ever lamenting the self-sacrifice of princess Ototachibana. The mysterious conflicts between Yamato Takeru and deities embodied as white animals demonstrate his increasing weakness, and, as they show the gods playing a role in his downfall they justify the idea that his life is following a tragic pattern, just as in a Greek tragedy great men are brought low by the jealousy of the gods. We note that Morris takes Yamato Takeru's downfall to be fated. Increasing numbers of poems are read as a mark of sensitivity, and an interpretation of the songs Yamato Takeru intones as he dies provide evidence of his romantic nature and his nostalgia for his home.

Thus the underlying principal of Morris's

interpretation is that the narration intends to describe the character development of a hero, as he progresses from youth to adulthood. In other words Morris reads the Yamato Takeru sequence as if it were a form of *Bildungsroman*, or a nineteenth-century European novel. For modern readers, such an approach is second nature. European novels however generally advertise their interest in character by the representation of inner worlds. Still, there has been a history of refinement, from long-winded inner dialogue to the presentation of moral development via representative scenes. These scenes are often theatrical in nature, and are very familiar to us through their use in cinema. We can see this development in the writings of Henry James. As a young novelist he was bedeviled by the extreme length of his works. Later, having some experience as a playwright, he saw the value of a novelistic construction that advances through significant scenes, rather than the tracing a continuous passage of time. James's later and more successful novels use this kind of construction, in which a single event, in a given setting, is presented, and the reader is both to assume that it possesses a significance in the wider story and is left to imagine several similar events filling in the spaces between it and the next event described.¹¹ This is how Morris interprets the scenes of *Kojiki*: symbolic and representative. When we consider the forms in which *Kojiki* was read in Morris's times, we notice an accident that probably contributed to such a reading. The earliest copies of *Kojiki* recorded it as a continuous text, divided into three volumes, but with neither section headings nor sub-headings. The Chinese introduction by the compiler, Ō no Yasumaro, for example, ran straight into the description of the separation of heaven and earth in the Japanese text itself (without punctuation marks). In *Kojikiden*, how-

11. See Lodge for a study of this development in James's novels.

ever, Motoori Norinaga divided the text into sections, identified with the reign of given emperors, and subdivided those sections into topics or events. Since then, it has become common in most editions to use these or similar sections, and to head them with descriptive headings and subheadings. Thus the reader of modern editions (and particularly their translations in English) see something which looks like a succession of scenes.

Morris's discovery of a story of personal growth and development traces this series of scenes and finds most of them to be distributable into a recognizable pattern. The *bildungsroman* model of the novel has been analyzed into a series of stages: there is a beginning of immature confidence and success, this is followed by an early "jar" or loss that serves to separate the young hero from his home. This leads to a difficult period of trial. Finally the main figure returns to the homeland to take his new place in society. Yamato Takeru's early successes reflect his immature confidence, his discovery that his father wishes him dead precipitates the second stage, the turning point that separates the hero from his home. His struggles with spirits in the east of Japan constitute the third. There is, however, no return to the homeland. Thus Morris discerns a Japanese pattern: heroes, after fulfilling the first three stages, exhibit their nobility by failing to ascend to the fourth. This is his "nobility of failure."

An important basis for Morris's reading is the appearance of poetry in the later stories, particularly the songs chanted by Yamato Takeru on his death bed. It might be thought at first that such poetry would be singularly ill-suited to such a task. As I have mentioned above, poetry in *Kojiki* has quite different implications from poetry in the modern western tradition. *Kojiki* poets are not to be thought of as being thereby sensi-

tive, romantic or especially sympathetic in any way. There are further difficulties. As is well-known, poetry in the *Kojiki* period is recyclable, that is it is readily placed in different contexts, and its relevance to its contexts is often superficial (or, rather, more formal than significant). Key poems underlying Morris's account appear in quite a different context in *Nihon shoki* (for example three of Yamato Takeru's death poems in *Kojiki* are in *Nihon shoki* sung by a traveling Emperor Keikō as a single poem). Thus Morris's use of them as a guide to Yamato Takeru's deeper feelings is questionable. In general, however, the obscurity and distance between the poems and their location in the accounts has an interesting reverse efficacy to the western reader, particularly when he is expecting a representative example of a character's emotional life. As in the case of the apparent existence of a sequence of separate symbolic scenes, a relatively sophisticated technique in the British literary tradition prepares us to read *Kojiki* in a special way. In his discussion of Shakespeare's achievement of opaque inwardness in his plays, Greenblatt discusses how a confused, opaque and contradictory description of motive achieves a kind of depth of interiority which a readily comprehensible avowal of reasons cannot evoke; it seems that this "strategic opacity" leads us to wonder about character and motivation, to speculate about the character's own degree of self-knowledge, beyond which we consider ourselves able to penetrate.¹² This is just what happens when we read, for example, YT's death poems. The gap between them and the situation is like a puzzle that leads readers into a kind of empathetic guess work, discovering in it emotions which are not stated plainly. In other words, the telling itself presents obstacles to understanding, which provoke us to speculate about YT's inner life.

12. See Greenblatt, 323 9.

It is probably clear by now the degree to which Morris's reading depends on the modern European tradition. We should also notice that he tilts the playing field in his own favor in his exposition, by picking selectively from *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, which tell quite different stories about Yamato Takeru (in *Nihon shoki*, for example, there is no stage two, for the hero volunteers to go and fight in the East, but Morris relates the *Kojiki* version; again, to show his character development, Morris has Yamato Takeru "always thinking with regret of his wife Ototachibana," which comes from the *Nihon shoki* version).

What do we see if we resist Morris's reading strategies? First of all, as Morris highlights the symbolic function of the various passages, taking them to be scenes deliberately chosen to describe an arc of character development, he overlooks those elements of the passages which offer independent satisfaction. Actually it is more complex than that. Morris is positively looking for readerly satisfaction, probably to interest his western readers in the Japanese tradition. Thus he is uncomfortable precisely with those elements to which his reading habits do not naturally respond. His discomfort is seen in various ways, omission or mockery, but we can take such areas of discomfort as a guide to rediscovering something of the original elements which gave these stories their life in their oral origins. Thus in our reconstruction we shall look at common structures shared by the Yamato Takeru passages and other sections of *Kojiki*. We should perhaps start by considering whether there is any reason to see Morris's primary strategy, which is to read each element in terms of its position within the overall arc of YT's life, and to give it symbolic or representative significance, as mistaken.

The fact is that there is little sign that such an overall *bildungsroman* was part of the expectations of the early consumers of *Kojiki*. As we know, the human kings sections of *Kojiki* are more or less organized as biographies of successive emperors, or histories of their reigns. In none of these sections is there any attempt at character portrayal or indication of a theory of personal development.¹³ Even the more substantial biographies are no more than collections of typical anecdotes, with little to connect them to either the individual emperor whom they figure or any stage in that emperor's life. Let us take as an example the series of incidents related concerning Emperor Yūryaku.

The first section tells of the entry of certain immigrant groups into Japan. The second tells of the emperor's irritation that someone built a house similar to his own palace, his order that it should be burnt down, and his mollification by an unusual gift. The next three sections record incidents in which Yūryaku is attracted by beautiful women met on his travels, with a variety of outcomes, each passage citing poems composed. The next two sections record poems composed while hunting, once at seeing a dragonfly eating a horse-fly, and once when up a tree to avoid the charge of a wild boar. The next section records the emperor's encounter with a deity and his retinue. After this there are four separate incidents where poems are exchanged with or offered by women. Finally we hear of the emperor's death at 124 years of age.

Each of these passages has interest of some kind, but there is no sign that they reward reading as a sequence or that their primary interest lies in their contribution to an arc describing the emperor's character. Where there is an organizing principle, it

13. The matter is different with *Nihon Shoki*, where there is a transparent and relatively unsuccessful attempt to present emperors as possessing the virtue that their power implies (in Chinese theories of rule). Note, though, that this involves the portrayal of virtue rather than character, and involves no theory of development.

seems to be in the collection together of similar narrative types, within the constraints of a chronological or historical order. Similar things can be said about other sequences in *Kojiki*.¹⁴

The structure of Yamato Takeru sequence — oral tradition and compilation

Analysis of the tales that make up Yamato Takeru stories in *Kojiki*

The Yamato Takeru stories are less separate from each other than those relating to Yūryaku, in that there are attempts here and there to tie separate anecdotes together, and one of these linking passages does refer to his character (*kokoro*). Still, as I shall argue below, this stitching together of anecdotes had its own aims, which did not include the construction of life as an emotional journey. The separate stories, which are distributed differently in *Nihon shoki*, clearly had their independent existences, for they belong to larger families of anecdotes scattered throughout *Kojiki*, with which they share certain narrative features. This is a common feature of oral collections of myths, legends and other stories. Such collections have been analyzed by narratologists and anthropologists into taxonomies, or else reduced into a fundamental grammar of meaning.¹⁵ I however prefer to see their common elements (mythemes) as creative responses to the expectations of listeners / readers, which in turn are stimulated to further expectations. A process of crystallization (like that described in Stendhal's *Amour*) generates increasingly sophisticated literary potential. The difference between my approach and that of narratologists is that I see the collection as ever in flux and amenable to creative development, indeed, as it stands it is a partial record of several inventions, partial be-

cause much inevitably is lost, having remained in the oral sphere. It is also clear that certain genres of narrative in Yamato Takeru were associated with specific aims, as we shall see.

A further dimension of these smaller tales in the Yamato Takeru narrative is an intense interest in what we might call word-games of various kinds. It seems clear that polysemy was regarded as highly significant in the world of such tales, and it is also put to several different uses.

Let us then consider the stories that are gathered together in the Yamato Takeru section of *Kojiki*, looking at their relation to other stories dealing with similar themes and material, and inquiring what readerly satisfactions they offer independent of their location in overall sequences. We shall pay less attention to those elements which are clearly part of the stitching together between tales, or various artificial additions which we shall observe, postponing a discussion of those elements to a later section.

The first continuous narrative in the Yamato Takeru sequence concerns Emperor Keikō's twin sons, the younger, Ousu and elder, Ōusu. The younger brother is later renamed Yamato Takeru. In this first narrative group, the elder brother appropriates two beautiful sisters, stops attending the court, and is murdered by Ousu:

Hereupon the emperor concluded from what he had heard that King Ōne, ancestor of the Miyatsuko of Mino, had two daughters, called Elder Princess and Younger Princess, who were beautiful. He therefore sent his son Ōusu to summon them to court. Ōusu, having been dispatched, did not summon them to the court, but straightaway slept with them himself. He moreover sought out other

14. Still even in this case modern readers bring such ideas to their reading. Chamberlain, in his translation, is convinced that the story of the boar is corrupt, because he feels that the implied cowardice of the emperor in climbing the tree is unlikely for a man of his bravery. Chamberlain, 398.

15. E.g. Propp, Lévi-Strauss.

women and falsely gave them the princesses' names and offered them in their place. The emperor knew they were not the same women, and he always stared at them, and never slept with them, so that they suffered...

Later, the emperor spoke to his son Ousu, saying: "I wonder why your elder brother does not attend the morning and evening meals. You should warmly persuade and instruct him." But after five days he still did not attend. Then the emperor asked Ousu, "Why does your elder brother not come? Did you instruct him?" and he replied, "I already warmly persuaded him." His father said, "How did you warmly persuade him?" He replied, "At dawn when he went to the privy, I waited and caught him, took and crushed him, stripped off his limbs, wrapped them in straw matting, and threw them away.

Primarily this story features the two brothers Ousu and Ōusu (Little and Big Mortar). Now Morris thought that its role was to indicate an exceptional lack of sibling affection and readiness to violence in Ousu. The reader of *Kojiki* is, however, repeatedly presented with anecdotes about older and younger brothers, usually of emperors or chieftains of some kind. These anecdotes constitute sets of variations of possible outcomes of a common situation. Whatever the continuity of this technique of "variations on a theme" later in the tradition, it has obvious connections to oral traditions of storytelling (as sometimes discussed in relation to *Heike Monogatari*) and so might be thought of as a natural consequence of Hieda no Are's memorized collection of stories before they were set in chronological order by Ō no Yasumaro.

In any case, if we look at the variations in stories of younger and elder brothers in *Kojiki* we can see them bringing certain

expectations. The primary one is shared with similar stories throughout ancient writings in the world, that is their conflict, and, generally, the triumph of the younger. In *Kojiki*, we note that when we have younger and elder brothers the older ones are usually killed or forced into submission by the younger, often in a striking and graphic way.

Ebersole explains these stories, and the interest they must have inspired, from the violent struggle that was a common part of succession disputes in the period (Saigō Nobutsuna says similar things in relation to the tendency of fathers to fear their sons). This is probably a valid explanation of a kind, but we should note that in *Kojiki* it has become a narrative expectation rather than a simple reflection of social structure. For example, In the story of the younger brother who temporarily swapped his right to the fruits of the mountains with the elder brother's rights to the sea, symbolized in the possession of a particular fishing hook, we see the younger brother disadvantaged in various ways, but blessed with divine favor, with the result that in the long run, he is able to torment his elder brother into permanent submission. Again upon Jimmu's death, his sons competed among themselves. The youngest, by finding the courage to murder the oldest, gained the submission of the middle brother, and inherited the throne. There are many similar stories, each with its own character, but each with a common structure. In some, brothers are willing to cede power to each other, for example Oke and Ōke (small and big basket), where the younger became Emperor Kenzō. Even when brothers are not competing for the throne, one finds that it is usual in stories in which brothers appear for the older one to either die, or be forced into permanent submission, or to give way from the start. Thus we can consider that the audience to the first

passage in the Yamato Takeru sequence, hearing of the two sons Ousu and Ōusu, were already waiting to hear how the elder one was overcome, and the younger prevailed.

This story also involves a pair of beautiful sisters, and again we can say something about the expectation for this *topos*. In *Kojiki* stories in which pairs of sisters are featured, a repeated issue is how beautiful or otherwise amenable they are to sexual intercourse with the emperor. A key element of such stories is which of the sisters the emperor gets to sleep with, and what happens when he fails to do so – not a good sign. There are a number of amusing variations where the ugly (or, in the case of a version associated with Emperor Yūryaku, frigid) sister is rejected, with unfortunate results. In the Ōusu variation, both sisters are pretty, but Emperor Keiko never gets to sleep with either of them, being presented with substitutes. There is likely to be a listener's expectation that someone will pay for this. This gives extra satisfaction to Ōusu's death.

A further stock element in *Kojiki* stories is spectacular or graphic killings. As well as the stripping off of the victim's limbs in this story, in the next one in the Yamato Takeru sequence we find another, the anal stabbing of the younger Kumaso. Similar anecdotes are found throughout *Kojiki*, for example, there is a story concerning the future Emperor Yūryaku. Hearing of the murder of his older brother, Emperor Ankō (a characteristic revenge murder scene, a striking forerunner of others later in the tradition),¹⁶ Yūryaku, slays another older brother for not looking concerned enough. He then finds another “insufficiently concerned” elder brother, drags him to a field and buries him standing in a pit. When the earth reaches up

to his lower back, its weight causes his eyes to burst forth and he dies. Yūryaku also assassinates another older brother while hunting, shooting him with an arrow, cutting his body into pieces, and burying them in the earth in a horse's manger. In general there are a number of striking killings in *Kojiki*.¹⁷ The violent murder by Yamato Takeru of his older brother, then, is merely a variation on this theme. As in other such descriptions there is no sign that this is meant to inform us of the unusual cruelty of the protagonist, and so it seems unlikely that such a message is inherent in the overall Yamato Takeru narrative.

We see then that this first story about Yamato Takeru takes its place among a series of anecdotes each with its own variation, in which, I believe, early listeners to such tales found entertainment. There are other kinds of enjoyment offered by this passage which tend to become invisible in translation, and again point away from the validity of Morris's reading. The term used for Ōusu's limbs is *eda* or “branch,” and the stripping off, wrapping and disposal of these may be intended to reverberate with some kind of vegetable food preparation. We note that in the next scene, the killing after the anal stabbing is again compared to slicing up a melon. This kind of wordplay reminds us the sensibility that in *waka* was appears as *engo*. In fact another kind of wordplay is also central to the effectiveness of this passage.

This time it involves the word *negu*, which I translate above as “warmly persuade.” Here I am following the analysis of Saigō Nobutsuna, who suggests that this “warmly persuade” played something of the role of the yakuza phrase: *kawaigaruru*, normally “to treat indulgently,” but in their usage meaning to torment or punish.¹⁸ We

16. For example, *Konjaku Monogatari*, book 25, tale 4.

17. And not only killings but also graphic physical punishments, for example the cutting of the knee tendons of a whole tribe by Emperor Kenzō, also in *Kojiki*.

might put this into a modern idiom by translating Keikō as telling Yamato Takeru to make his older brother “an offer” to come to meals “that he cannot refuse.” A central pleasure offered by this story then is Ousu’s misinterpretation of his father’s remark, and the way that it enables him to fulfil certain stock expectations in a new and unexpected way. Sakashita Keihachi is of the opinion that such verbal games were intended to amuse, and indeed were prominent elements in *Kojiki*’s narrative effects, but unfortunately much of such wordplay is probably now invisible to us.¹⁹

Subjugation of the West

The next passage starts a series of incidents in which Yamato Takeru subjugates rebels against the Yamato polity. They are commonly divided into the first two, which take place in the west of Japan, and the remainder, involving the east. The division however also reflects a difference in kind and implication.²⁰ In fact they belong to two different families of narrative. In general, we can say that the western subjugations feature descriptions of fights between clearly delineated individuals in a human world, whereas the eastern subjugations largely face deities and spirits of various locations, or else vaguely described groups of dwellers. A contrast between the passages of the first and second group is to be seen in the language of subjugation: the western human foes are “killed” (*uchikoroshita*), whereas the eastern ones, mainly deities and spirits, are more generally “persuaded and pacified” (*kotomuke yawashita*). The division is not, however, as clear cut as Sunairi argues, and it seems that we have to distinguish between core elements in the stories and additions that result from the editorial stitching to-

gether that we have mentioned earlier.

Let us survey then the types of passages elsewhere in *Kojiki* that share features with the western subjugation, and conjecture about the narrative expectations that they satisfy.

In the case of the killing of the Kumaso brothers, the young Yamato Takeru disguises himself as a girl (with clothes given to him in advance by his aunt Yamatohime) to get close to the Kumaso brothers drinking at a banquet, and stabs them to death (with a small sword, also received from his aunt) when they are drunk, getting a name in return. The use of a trick to kill an opponent is a common narrative device in all oral traditions, and it is also a feature of a number of stories in *Kojiki*, including this and the next Yamato Takeru anecdote, the killing of Izumo Takeru. Sometimes the tricks are attempted by the enemy (for example the trap set by the Ukashi brothers for the Emperor Jimmu) in which case they fail. The trick in this case involves pretending to peacefully attend the Kumaso banquet in a pit dwelling. We note again a similarity to another story involving Jimmu, in which he arranges a banquet for a large number of “braves” (i.e. *takeru*) in a cave, and then at a signal has those serving the food cut down the enemy. Finally, there are a number of stories in which a youth or child is unexpectedly able to overcome a mature warrior by courage and innocence. This story participates in all of these *topoi*, and in addition adds one of those spectacular or gruesome killings.

The gaining of a name during the killing in question is of interest. The younger Kumaso Takeru sees his brother killed and tries to flee the pit:

Ousu chased him to the foot of the ladder out of the pit, grabbed him from behind

18. Note the similar term in London gang culture: “gentle persuasion” (to give someone a little “gentle persuasion” indicates a beating or torture).

19. See Sakashita (1 12).

20. See Sunairi (5 66).

and pierced him with his sword through the rear end. Then the Kumaso Brave said, “Do not move the sword! I have something to say.” Ousu allowed him a little time, pushing him down on the ground.

After a brief dialogue, the Kumaso Brave concludes:

“I will give you a name. From now on you shall be known as Prince Yamato Takeru.” When he finished saying this, Ousu directly sliced him up as if he were cutting a ripe melon and killed him.

It is interesting to note Sunairi Tsuneo’s belief that the section from after “rear end” to “finished saying this” is a later insertion to an original narrative, the intent of which is to establish the identity between the prince Ousu and the hero Yamato Takeru. Thus the original story would simply have: “pierced him with his sword through the rear end, and directly sliced him up as if he were cutting a ripe melon.” This certainly is more realistic. The exchange of dialog in the midst of a fight is seen often in other martial stories later in the tradition, and it is interesting to think that the original case which inspired this narrative pattern was a by-product of a quite different narrative need. The passage closes:

From that time his name was celebrated as Yamato Takeru no Mikoto. Then as he returned to the capital he persuaded all the gods of the mountains, rivers and passes to be peaceful, before returning to the court.

This is clearly a linking passage inserted as part of the compilation of the series, and we will have reason to consider it later.

The next story concerns the now “Yamato Takeru” and his fight with Izumo Takeru:

Directly he entered the land of Izumo. He wished to kill Izumo Takeru, so he went and pledged friendship. Meanwhile he secretly made a fake sword with red oak and girded it around his waist. Then he went swimming in the River Hi with Izumo Takeru. Getting out first, he took the sword that Izumo Takeru had taken off and put it on, saying, “Let us exchange swords.” Then Izumo Takeru, emerging from the river, put on Yamato Takeru’s fake sword. Yamato Takeru challenged him, saying, “let us cross swords.” When they tried to draw their swords, Izumo Takeru was unable to draw the fake one. Yamato Takeru drew his and killed Izumo Takeru. Thereupon he sung:

The sword worn by the Brave of Izumo,
(The many branching water plant with
the many buds,)

The black vines wrapped many times,
Contain no blade,
How pathetic!

Thus he swept away and subjugated his
foes and came up to the capital and re-
ported his return.

This is another story of beating an enemy by trickery. This same story is in fact related about someone else in a different reign in *Nihon shoki*.²¹ This reminds us of the thinness of connection between events told in these stories and the identities of their participants a matter seen in other ways, for example the generic nature of many names of stock participants.²² Another aspect of this telling that works against Morris’s reading is the gloating poem/song. In the stories of Emperor Jimmu’s successful killings of “rebels” in his pacifying journey, there are a number of such songs. To see in such “fondness for poetry” a sign of a ro-

21. It is told about two Izumo brothers in the reign of Emperor Sūjin, hence there it is a fratricide story.

22. For example elder and younger sisters (“named” otohime and ehime-younger princess / elder princess), or Ototachibanahime-Elder princess flowering orange, etc.

mantic or sentimental character is of course inappropriate.

As a further example of variations on themes, it is interesting to note that there are three exchange stories in *Kojiki*, of which this exchange of swords is one. The others are the exchange of the produce of the mountain for that of the sea, and the exchange of names in the reign of Chūai. In each case, naturally, the narrative interest lies in who gets the better deal.

As this is the first passage we have looked at including a poem / song, we should note the similar structure to early *Ise Monogatari* stories, in that the narrative and the song both depend on each other, and it is difficult to determine which preceded.

The turning point.

At the close of the above section is another compiler's addition, and this leads into a linking section which does a number of important jobs. It is not, however, an anecdote or story in itself (having neither a stock narrative shape, an exchange of poems, nor the establishment of names or precedents for future practices). We shall consider aspects of the linkages between sections together below, but at this point let us look at those elements that are placed here specifically to set up later tales in the sequence.

The situation is that the emperor sends Yamato Takeru on another job of pacification, this time to the east, and gives him an exorcist's spear and a follower (a relative on his mother's side) to help him. Yamato Takeru on his way east drops in on his aunt Yamato hime at the Ise Shrine and complains that the emperor must wish him dead and weeps. The aunt gives him objects as she did before: a magical sword (*Kusanagi*) and a mysterious bag. These are both used in a typical riddle story that is met with all over the world, but the sword is also connected to

the story of the Princess Miyazu.

Subjugation of the east

From this point we have a series of variants of oral tales, which are strung together to convert Yamato Takeru's journey to the east into a parallel of Jimmu's progress, featuring such elements as the description of a geographical traceable journey, the foundation of place names, overcoming tricks attempted by local rebels, the need for magic swords, the appearance of deities in the form of white animals and the danger of divine miasma, bringing on illness or unconsciousness.

The first story is a version of a universal riddle how to escape from an advancing fire, answer: by lighting a counter-fire. The fire is a trap set up by local people, on whom Yamato Takeru gets poetic justice by burning them to death in turn. The interest of the story is clearly rooted in these two elements answering the question how does the hero escape, and the pleasure of seeing the "poetic justice" by which the would-be burners are burnt to death in their turn.²³ There are, in addition, associations with a stock series of poems about the spring-burning of fields and lovers caught in them that we can see in *Man'yōshū* and later works that are used to connect the next story element to this one. The passage closes with another *topos* of *Kojiki* stories, that is the declaration that an event provides the origin of a place name. The area is subsequently named, Yakizu, meaning: Burning ford. In general we can see this characteristic element as one of a number of puns or exploitations of polysemy that constitute a central literary satisfaction in the Japanese tradition poetic and otherwise. The interest in wordplay is common to many oral traditions, but the depth of its importance to Japan can be explained by the overwhelming nature of the importation of

23. This kind of poetic justice figures prominently in *Nihon ryōiki* tales, where it bears some similarity to ideas of karmic reaction.

Chinese culture and language. Polysemy, by being beyond translation, is a symbolic locus of resistance to imported culture.²⁴ In the particular form of the origination of place names, we see these cluster in accounts of the subjugation of rebel areas, and so probably should understand them to have a political purpose, the declaration of the right to rule those named areas, but I think that they developed into a kind of literary pleasure, as we shall see in later examples.

The next story tells of the suicide of Yamato Takeru's "empress" (*kisaki*) to appease a sea-deity who is stirring up the waves in the sea where the entourage is crossing in a boat. This incident is striking in that is not one of a number of variations on a theme seen elsewhere in the work, but rather stands alone. The situation where a woman sacrifices herself for her lord is of course inherently dramatic. We note signs of a particular kind of incantatory pleasure in the description of the way she descended into the sea:

She sat on eightfold sedge mats,
eightfold skin mats, eightfold silk mats,
spread over the waves.

Finally she sings a version of the song type mentioned in relation to the previous tale:

Oh, my lord, who inquired [after me]
Standing midst the flames,
Of the fire burning
The small meadow of Sagamu

In fact, there is no mention in the previous anecdote of Yamato Takeru "inquiring" after anyone. The topos of a final poem / song composed while facing death, in particular one in which one expresses one's deepest feelings, can be seen throughout the Japanese literary tradition.

The next story is the first of two describ-

ing the appearances of deities in the form of white animals. This again seems to be a standard theme. It seems that whiteness in animals indicates the manifestation of deities. (In *Kojiki* there are four prominent examples: the white bear that appears to Emperor Jimmu, the white deer and boar that appear to Yamato Takeru, and the white bird into which Yamato Takeru is transformed at death.) Kawasoe Hiroshi has discovered in three of these stories a verbal link between the animal and the context: the bear (*kuma*) appears at Kumanu, the deer (*shika*) at Ashigari (*a-shika-ri*) pass, the boar (*i*) at Ibuki mountain.²⁵ In each of these, the expectation again appears to be that the deity poses a danger in the form of a sick-making miasma,²⁶ and the interest in the story is how the hero resists this.

In the case of Emperor Jimmu at Kumanu, a white bear appeared and he and his army all fell unconscious. He was revived by the receipt from the high plain of heaven of a magic sword. This story is closely related to the second appearance of a white animal to Yamato Takeru. In the first anecdote, however, Yamato Takeru kills the animal by throwing a piece of smelly root in its eye. This incident then provides one of two etymologies for the important place name Azuma (the eastern lands), that is *atsu-ma* (hit the eye). This clearly does not fit Morris's image of the "sensitive Yamato Takeru" as well as the other etymology, also indicated, *a tsuma*, (my wife).²⁷

The next two incidents describe another characteristic story type: the exchange of poems. The first, a brief exchange of poems with an old man has at its main point the wit of the man to produce a poem in short order and his reward which is to be made the chief

24. See Okada.

25. Kawasoe (145/69).

26. In the reign of Sūjin, illness is caused by unpropitiated deities of mountain areas who cause "pestilential vapors" to arise.

27. The way the story is told here both derivations (which are separately attested to elsewhere in the tradition, the first in the ninth century Ryō no gige, and the second in *Nihon shoki*) are alluded to (see Sakashita, 1 19).

of Azuma. A similar dynamic informs the second story, which is more characteristic. The exchange is between Yamato Takeru and his intended wife. The key issue again is how the woman cleverly comes up with a poem. Here the poem needs to avert the possible anger of Yamato Takeru, and reminds us of a similar situation in the reign of Yūryaku, when a serving woman averts his anger at a cup which is not quite clean being offered him by a clever poem. In the present case, Yamato Takeru comes to sleep with Princess Miyazu, and notices blood on her clothes indicating that she is menstruating. His poem is

Over far Mount Kagu fly the swans with
their sickle like necks
slender and weak.

I wish to rest my head in your slender
and weak arms, to sleep, but on the
skirts of the robe you wear, the moon
has arisen.

Her reply:

Prince of the high shining sun, my
reigning lord!

The new years come and go, and so do
the new moons. Indeed, while desper-
ately waiting for you, the moon has
risen on the skirts of my robe.

The technique of Miyazu's poem is to soften up the prince first by reminding him of his descent from the sun-goddess. As the sun circulates so does the moon. Thus it is natural that menstrual cycles come and go. The poem also points out that he is the one responsible for the timing of their meeting.

That this anecdote is originally independent of the context given it here is supported by the fact that the poem refers to the man as if he were a reigning emperor, and also the name Miyazu, which was probably originally Miyawazuhime, the princess with whom one does not get to sleep. The name was thus probably generic to the story, not related to anything outside it. Nevertheless,

the reasons for its inclusion here, which we discuss further later, seem to derive from the similarity of that name to *miyazu* shrine master, which is connected to the added element in which Yamato Takeru leaves the magic sword Kusanagi at Miyazuhime's residence after sleeping with her (regardless of here menstruation), and departs.

This sets the reader up for the penultimate anecdote, the second encounter with a deity, this time in the form of a white boar. Just like Jimmu in his similar encounter, Yamato Takeru is dazed, and this leads to his decline and death. In the Jimmu encounter a divine sword is required to combat the illness, but Yamato Takeru has left his behind. Although he discovers an alternative sword, associated with which he addresses a pine tree, with what is thought to have originally been a folk song, it does not save him. A series of foundings of place names contributes to the listeners interest in this section, for they are both reasonable generic place names on a mountain pass, and also track his deteriorating condition - in other words, they are not so much derivations of actual places, as games with words intended to entertain.

In the final anecdote, Yamato sings a series of songs and dies. As we have mentioned parting words or songs before dying is a stock element of early narrative. Whilst people have struggled to interpret the songs in question in this case, it is important to note that the first three are sung as one song in quite different circumstances in *Nihon Shoki* by the Emperor Keikō. There they are identified as expressing homesickness, and so we can suppose that they are inserted here to express the fact that Yamato Takeru is far from his home. The final poem, also seems to be recycled, but in context it can be taken to regret leaving the divine sword Kusanagi with Miyazu.

The aims behind the compilation of the Yamato Takeru sequence

The anecdotes that make up the Yamato Takeru group of stories comprise a series of variations on story types seen throughout *Kojiki*. Those aspects of them that Ivan Morris read as representations of Yamato Takeru's changing character are actually the product of the expectations that the various story types entail, rather than any essential arc of the overall narrative. It is true that in the penultimate story, Yamato Takeru fails to overcome his enemy and thus dies, but the reason for this is probably related to a quite separate editorial intention as I shall discuss below. There is of course an obvious reason for the general shape into which the Yamato Takeru sequence falls: it is intended to be chronological. Thus, the stories which are generally told of young men come early on and those in which he dies, of necessity, come at the end. This is only to be seen as an unexpected glorious failure if it is felt to diverge from another expectation brought to it, the *bildungsroman*.

So what other motives can we perceive behind the selection of tales. It seems fairly clear that a primary intention is not so much to create a biography of a hero, but rather to re-establish the authority of the imperial lineage over certain geographical regions, by a re-enactment of the first emperor's Jimmu's original eastward progress. On that earlier occasion, there were essentially two types of subjugating account: the killing of rebels, marked by many of the elements we have seen in the stories above, and described through direct accounts of methods by which people met their ends; and the subjugation of spirits and deities, expressed less concretely, by the use of the special term "*kotomuke-yawasu*," that is, a kind of ritual persuasion by the use of words, and subsequent pacifica-

tion or settling. The importance of this dual subjugation is reflected in the fact that the compiler of *Kojiki* repeatedly inserts between incidents such phrases as:

"He then persuaded and settled the troublesome deities of the mountains and rivers."

This is surely intended to justify Yamato authority in distant regions. The similarity with Jimmu is particularly shown by the types of stories gathered together in Yamato Takeru's eastward progress, for they match closely those told concerning Jimmu's own journey of subjugation.²⁸ It also seems clear that an actual geography informed the arrangement of anecdotes. As Saigō Nobutsuna, has investigated, this probably explains the inclusion of the Otochibana story, which otherwise has little purpose.

Another important interest that becomes apparent in the linking sections concerns the Ise shrine and particularly its connection to the sword Kusanagi that eventually made up part of the imperial regalia. It has often been suggested that the use of Yamatohime, the Ise shrine maiden, to give magical aid to Yamato Takeru is intended to promote the spiritual importance and effectiveness of the Ise shrine. In addition there is the odd historical fact that the sword Kusanagi, found in the dragon's tale by Susanoo, came at some point into the possession of the Atsuta shrine in Owari. We can see the sequence as being an explanation of this anomaly: the sword was given by the Ise shrine to Yamato Takeru to help him subjugate wild deities in the east. He happened to leave it there, and died before he could bring it back.

In this regard the story of Miyazuhime is central. As Saigō Nobutsuna points out, the name Miyazuhime (read as Shrine master princess), her location (in Owari), and

28. For example, the trap of the burning meadow parallels that set by the elder Ukashi, and in both cases the one who sets the trap is made to die by the same means.

the leaving of the sword, are the key elements in the story. At the same time, it seems that the similarity of names allows the generic poem exchange story (of Miyawazuhime, the princess with whom one does not get to sleep) to be brought in as well. This also, in the end, is probably behind the requirement that Yamato Takeru, not having the spiritual sword with him, should die in contrast to Emperor Jimmu, who had his magic sword brought to him by the will of the gods. That this death should occur on the way home is necessitated by the requirement that the geographical subjugation should be complete.

Final remarks

The aim of this study has not been to destroy Ivan Morris's entertaining interpretation, for it does of course to some degree reflect how current readers interpret the story, if not how the story was originally constructed. I think we can assert that the story was not at that time so much about an individual hero and his psychological journey, as it was about a number of incidents told to satisfy generic narrative expectations and organized to satisfy certain ideological motives. In general it is important to attempt to be conscious of the reading strategies one brings to older and foreign traditions. This has been a preliminary attempt to resurrect the readings likely to have been prominent when the *Kojiki* version of the Yamato Takeru sequence was compiled. With these reading conventions as a basis, we can advance to a consideration of what new conventions of narrative inform the workings of the same materials in *Nihon shoki*, and the relation between those conventions and Chinese historiographical narratives to which early Japanese were exposed.

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