

Yamato: Glossary & Characters

Amaterasu: (Full name: Amaterasu ômikami, Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven)

Amaterasu, or the Sun Goddess, is the principal deity of **Shinto** mythology. According to this mythology, she is the progenitor of the imperial line. In other words, all Japanese emperors are related to Amaterasu and thus divine themselves. It was not until after Japan's defeat in World War II and occupation by Allied forces that the Japanese emperor renounced his claims to divinity.

According to *Kojiki*, Amaterasu was born from **Izanagi's** left eye while he purified himself after traveling to the netherworld, Yomi. A variant myth is found in *Nihon shoki*; here, Amaterasu is born after Izanagi and Izanami have intercourse. In all the myths, however, this deity is sent to rule the Heavenly Plain, or Takamagahara. The most famous episode surrounding Amaterasu involves her confrontation with her fierce brother, **Susanowo**, the turbulent deity of the Sea Plain. Having been expelled by their father, Susanowo ascends to the heavens to bid his sister farewell. However, once there, he wreaks havoc, and a frightened Amaterasu hides herself in a cave, thus throwing the world into darkness (solar eclipse) and chaos: "constant night reigned, and the cries of the myriad deities were everywhere abundant, like summer flies; and all manner of calamities arose. (Philippi, p. 81)" The myriad other deities finally lured her out of her hiding place by making offerings of jewels, by performing tempting dances and laughing merrily, and by using a mirror, in which Amaterasu spies her own reflection, to entice the Sun Goddess out of her hiding place. The jewels and mirror used to lure Amaterasu out of the cave become two of the three **imperial regalia** associated with imperial line. Some of the great clans (**uji**) and later families (including aristocratic ones and families of hereditary actors/performers) eventually claim these lesser but resourceful deities as their ancestors.

Later in the myths, Amaterasu dispatches her grandson **Ninigi** to descend from the heavens and to pacify the Japanese islands. She bestows upon him the imperial regalia, and it is Ninigi's great-grandson, **Jimmu**, who becomes Japan's legendary first emperor.

Amaterasu is worshipped at **Ise Shrine**, the central shrine of the Shinto religion. The Sun Goddess Amaterasu and Japan's use of solar symbolism (e.g., the land of the rising sun) are closely intertwined and have been powerful and controversial aspects of Japan's construction and presentation of itself for well over one millennium.

Hieda no Are: (Late 7th and early 8th century) Hieda no Are is famous for reciting from memory the *teiki* (imperial records, genealogies of the rulers) and other records and legends of antiquity to O no Yasumaro, the compiler of *Kojiki*. In the preface to this work, Yasumaro states that Hieda no Are was a *toneri*, or attendant, in the service of Emperor Temmu and that he "could repeat orally whatever met his eye, and whatever struck his ears was indelibly impressed in his heart (Philippi, p. 41-42)." Scholars disagree as to whether Hieda no Are was a man or a woman and as to whether Hieda no Are recited everything from memory or, as is

more likely, also had recourse to written documents. Hieda no Are is said to belong to the Sarume-no-kimi clan; this clan, descended from the goddess Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto, who was among those who lured Amaterasu out of the cave, was known for its hereditary female shamans who performed songs, dances, and other rites. On the other hand, the office of *toneri* suggests a man. Regardless, Hieda no Are's prominent role in the compilation of *Kojiki* illustrates that during this period memory and oral recitation were considered authoritative sources, less likely than written records to be marred by errors and falsehoods. Some sources claim that Hieda no Are was blind, as were many reciters (see *kataribe*) both in this early period and continuing on through the medieval period.

Imperial Regalia: The three sacred objects that traditionally symbolize the legitimacy and authority of the Japanese emperor. These include a string of jewels, a mirror, and a sword. The accession of a new emperor is theoretically not accomplished until he receives the transfer of these objects in a special rite known as the Kenji togyo no gi. According to the myths in *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the myriad deities offered these jewels to Amaterasu while she was hiding in the cave. And the mirror is the one these same deities used to lure her out of the cave. Traditionally, this mirror was said to be the embodiment of the Sun Goddess; for an emperor to see his own reflection in it was to see his own divinity. Amaterasu's brother Susanowo presented the sword to Amaterasu as a sign of his submission after his exile and circuit of conquests in the land of Izumo. Amaterasu handed these three objects to her grandson Ninigi before he descended from the heavens to pacify the Japanese islands. The sword, say the myths, is the same one lent to Yamato Takeru, by his aunt the Ise Priestess (see Ise Shrine). Later, this same sword was supposedly lost during the battle of Dannoura (*Tale of Heike*) in 1185 when the young Emperor Antoku drowned.

It is said that these three objects have been passed from one emperor to the next. According to the mythology, the originals were enshrined at Ise Shrine about 2000 years ago for protection and prevention of human pollution and that replicas have been housed at the imperial palace.

Ise Shrine: One of the most important Shinto shrines. It is located in the city of Ise in Mie Prefecture. (MAP) This shrine, believed to enshrine the ancestral deities of the imperial family, was closed to the public until the warring period of the 15th century when the shrine desperately needed money for maintenance.

This shrine consists of two parts: the inner shrine and the outer shrine. The sacred mirror of the imperial regalia, which represents Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, is housed here. According to *Nihon shoki* (720), Ise shrine was established when the daughter of the legendary Emperor Suinin (reigned ca 29 B.C. to 70 A.D.), Yamatohime (also the aunt of Yamato Takeru), became a Shinto priestess and traveled around looking for a resting-place for the sacred mirror. According to the myths, when Yamatohime came to Ise, she allegedly heard Amaterasu say that this was the place, so Yamatohime built a shrine on that spot and enshrined the mirror/goddess. An imperial princess filled the role of the Ise priestess from this time until the mid-fourteenth century.

The inner shrine is made of plain cypress wood in a style that is prohibited for all other shrines. They rebuild this main structure every 21 years. This last occurred in 1994. (PICTURE) The outer shrine is said to date from the 5th century and to house the deity of food, clothing, and housing. Its style is similar but not identical to that of the inner shrine, and it, too, is rebuilt at regular intervals.

Izanagi and Izanami: Izanagi (the male who invites) and Izanami (the female who invites) are the first important deities appearing in the creation myths found in *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. They are brother and sister, husband and wife; and, they are the mythological creators of the Japanese islands and its gods. The heavenly deities command this couple to solidify the land and to procreate. According to the myths, brother and sister descend onto the Bridge of Heaven, thrust a heavenly jeweled spear into the drifting liquid land, and in their stirring cause an island (Onogoro) to form. Upon this island they build a pillar, unite in marriage, and begin to create the land and deities of Japan. As well as providing a vivid and fascinating creation myth, their story gives us several hints about ancient concepts of marriage/incest, procreation, miscarriage, and gender roles. For example, the first time Izanagi and Izanami have intercourse, the female Izanami is the first to express her delight. As a result of the woman speaking first, they produce a deformed leech-child, which they discard! Upon consulting with the heavenly deities, they try it again. This time the male Izanagi speaks first and all goes well. They finally produce the eight great islands of Japan (MAP), and six lesser islands. The creation of the land by copulating deities appears to be unique in world mythology.

After creating the land, Izanagi and Izanami go on to produce the deities of the land, sea, winds, mountains, etc. While giving birth to the Fire Deity, Izanami falls mortally ill from the burns she suffers in childbirth. Izanagi becomes enraged with his own offspring and cuts off the Fire Deity's head. This and the following scenes are vivid and violent but throughout we see the power and explosive reproductive force of nature. Urine, blood, feces, and tears, all of these become the source of life. Some account for the "life force" of feces and such as a result of the significance of these materials as fertilizers in ancient Japan.

After her death, Izanami travels to Yomi, the land of darkness and death, and Izanagi goes in search of his wife (similar to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice). By the time Izanagi finds her, Izanami has already eaten from the ovens of Yomi; however, wishing to return with her husband, Izanami says that she will go speak with the rulers of Yomi and ask them if she may leave. She warns Izanagi not to look upon her face. When she does not return for some time, Izanagi lights a small fire and goes in search of her. Finally, he spies her maggot-infested body and flees in terror. Izanami is shamed and angered, and subsequently the two break their troth and the lands of the living and the dead are forever sealed off from each other. Izanami, now of Yomi, vows that she will strangle 1000 mortals a day. Izanagi, in turns, vows to have 1500 born on each day. This little exchange shows how myths give answers to urgent questions like why do people die? And why is there population growth?

According to *Kojiki*, upon fleeing from the pollution of Yomi, Izanagi goes to a stream to purify himself and in this process gives birth to more deities. While washing his left eye, Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, is born. And from his nose, Susanowo, the ocean deity, is born.

According to some scholars, Izanagi and Izanami may have been the local deities of certain fishing populations, and that the myths surrounding them may be related to similar Polynesian myths.

Jimmu, Emperor: Legendary first emperor of Japan and great-grandson of Ninigi. He is said to have traveled from Kyûshû, the main westernmost island of Japan, to the central province of Yamato where he conquered all the local leaders and pacified the region. After his conquest of Yamato, according to *Nihon shoki*, he becomes the first emperor of Japan in 660 B.C. Legend has it that he lived to be 127 years old. Not only do these dates seem improbably early, some question whether Jimmu ever really existed at all. More likely, Jimmu is a composite figure of several legendary nation-builders, and the myths surrounding him grew out of a desire to explain the origins of Japan's imperial line. Various accounts of his travels and heroic adventures can be found in both *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*.

Kataribe: This term is used to identify guilds of reciters and the reciters themselves. Kataribe were hereditary occupational groups that specialized in reciting orally transmitted information and stories. Not unlike western bards, these kataribe were active from preliterate into literate times. They memorized and recited songs, legendary feats, genealogies, and local myths and played important roles in the ritual observances and other important occasions associated with the Yamato court and other regions. Their role in the compilation of *Kojiki* is not clear, but it is likely that they provided some of the stories and also possible that Hieda no Are belonged to this group.

***Kojiki*:** (Record [ki] of Ancient [ko] Matters [ji], 712) *Kojiki* is the oldest extant Japanese text and the most important repository of Japan's myths, legends, and earliest songs. Starting with the Age of the Gods and the creation of heaven and earth, this large work includes the stories of all the important Japanese deities and the creation and foundation of Japan. In addition, we find the stories of Japan's early cultural heroes and rulers, and the chronological account moves from the reigns of the legendary early emperors of Japan to historical times. The account ends around the year 628. *Kojiki* is Japan's earliest genealogy, history, and storehouse of fascinating stories. It is also the primary and most sacred text of Shinto, the native Japanese religion, as well as an important literary work because it contains Japan's earliest recorded poetry, myths, and anecdotes. Until the early 20th century, people read *Kojiki* as history and not literature, and it was definitely created with the notion that it was a history, a collection of facts.

Many of the myths, fables, and stories contained in *Kojiki* certainly predate 712, when the work was completed, and are reworked versions of oral tales, local legends, etc.. Kataribe (reciters similar to bards) memorized and recited songs and myths; they played important roles in the ritual observances and celebrations of the Yamato Court and outlying regions. Their role in the compilation of *Kojiki* is not clear, but it is likely that they provided many of the stories. There were other sources, as well. These included written documents such as *teiki* (imperial chronicles, basic information about the imperial family) and *honji* (fundamental dicta).

In the 7th and 8th centuries, Japan was heavily under the influence of China and regarded China's political, social, religious institutions as ideal models for the establishment of a Japanese centralized government and court society. In addition, the only writing system in use in Japan was that of Chinese characters (*kanji*). Most official documents and the business of government were recorded in Chinese (in much the same way that European countries used Latin). Gradually, Chinese characters were adapted to represent the Japanese language, but Chinese continued for centuries to be the primary written language of the world of men, government, and all other "serious" endeavors. O no Yasumaro, the scribe who compiled *Kojiki*, however, used a complex method that allowed him to use Chinese characters to transcribe the Japanese language. Therefore, much of this work is not written IN Chinese, as was another early official history, *Nihon shoki* (720), which covers much of the same material as *Kojiki*.

According to the preface of this work, written in Chinese, Emperor Temmu believed that there were many errors in the official documents and histories and that these distorted "the facts." The emperor issued a decree that a new and correct history be compiled that would correct these errors and shortcomings and establish the "correct" history of Japan before it was too late. Also, China had a long tradition of recording its history, and it is likely that the rulers of Japan wanted (and needed) to establish a similar standard. So, *Kojiki* was seen as an, or even THE, authoritative history of Japan and continued to be read as history, if not fact, until as recently as the 20th century.

Thus, in 681, Emperor Temmu commanded the court attendant, Hieda no Are to memorize the court documents (e.g., *teiki* and *honji*) and important myths surrounding the Yamato lineage and its satellites. Hieda no Are later recited these to O no Yasumaro who completed the project in 712.

Kojiki is a largely chronological but not very unified narrative. It is highly episodic and often branches off in unexpected directions that often contradict earlier portions. It is in many ways a huge compendium of tales, legends, etymologies, myths, genealogies. basically a collection of anything that was thought to be true or necessary. It was not conceived of as a work of literature. Like many myths, these myths often provide answers to urgent and fundamental questions regarding a wide range of phenomena including miscarriage, marriage, death, population growth, solar eclipse, etc. However, the primary motivation of this relatively polished project is to legitimize the authority of the victors (i.e., the Yamato clan [**uji**] and the

imperial line) and to present a mythology that reflects this new power configuration and the hierarchy it demands.

One unusual aspect of the Japanese myths is that few, if any, of the deities or heroes in *Kojiki* are infallible or 100% good or evil. Also, there seems to be much less of an emphasis in these myths on proper morality or ethics. Deities are flawed, some behave quite despicably, and it is difficult to find a purely "heroic" character. Or, perhaps, the Japanese myths can help us redefine our notions of what is heroic or noble and find nobility in weakness or even failure.

See entries for **Izanagi and Izanami**, **Amaterasu**, **Susanowo**, **Ninigi**, and **Yamato Takeru** for information on the primary myths included in the first two books of this work.

Nara period: (710-794) Period when the capital was located at Heijō (Modern day Nara) in the Yamato Plain. The capital was actually at a different location from 784-794, but the period until the establishment of the Heian capital in 794 in present-day Kyoto is usually regarded as the Nara period. This period is characterized by the full implementation of the reforms undertaken in the previous Yamato period. (see also **Emperor Temmu**), the flourishing of Buddhism as the religion of the court, and an overall boom in intellectual, religious, and artistic activity and growth. *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* are both products of the early years of this period.

Nihon shoki: (Chronicles of Japan, completed in 720) This is the oldest official history of Japan. It is also known as *Nihongi*. *Nihon shoki* is a **Nara period** (710-794) work commissioned by **Emperor Temmu** around 681 that recounts the myths and history of Japan from the Age of the Gods to the end of the 7th century. While it is often discussed in conjunction with *Kojiki* and indeed shares a great deal of content and intent with this work, in many other ways it is very different from *Kojiki*. For example, today, *Nihon shoki* is usually studied in history classes and *Kojiki* in literature classes. However, the differences are not only matters of reception. They differ in construction and method, too. Rather than being the work of one scribe (who used Chinese characters to represent Japanese sounds) and one reciter, a committee of nobles and officials, including **O no Yasumaro**, recorded in fluent and formal Chinese the "historical facts" of Japan. Scholars, in trying to determine why the court would have compiled two histories in less than 10 years, suggest that *Kojiki* was the unofficial history intended for domestic use and that *Nihon shoki* was the official history, written in Chinese, and intended to stand on par with the dynastic histories of China. This desire to construct a national identity vis-à-vis China helps explain the use of the term *Nihon* (Japan) in the title.

The chief editor of *Nihon shoki* was Prince Toneri, a son of Emperor Temmu. The completed 30-volume work included myths, legends, history, and important genealogy charts. It is significantly larger than *Kojiki* and often includes several variants of the same myths in an attempt to be thorough and authoritative. It also includes far more dates and details than *Kojiki*. *Nihon shoki* has a much more political tone than *Kojiki*, and it downplays much of the awe and heroics found in the latter. *Nihon shoki* pays more attention to recent events and to

Japan's relations with China and Korea than to the mythical events that seem to dominate *Kojiki*.

Nihon shoki is the first of six officially compiled chronicles (*Rikkokkushū*) that continued until the end of the 9th century.

Nihongi: see *Nihon shoki*.

Ninigi: Grandson of the goddess **Amaterasu** and great-grandfather of **Emperor Jimmu**, the legendary first emperor of Japan. Amaterasu presented her grandson with three treasures that came to be known as the **imperial regalia**, symbols of imperial authority and legitimacy: a string of precious jewels, a sword, and a mirror. Amaterasu then commanded Ninigi to descend from the heavens and to pacify the islands of Japan and to dwell on earth. He makes his descent along with escort deities who are the ancestors of five of the major clans (**uji**) of early Japan.

Book One of *Kojiki* ends with the accounts of Ninigi's experiences. In these stories, we learn, for example, why the emperors of Japan, Ninigi's descendants, are mortal unlike their divine ancestors. According to these myths, Ninigi falls in love with a young maiden who has an older sister. The girls' father wants Ninigi to marry both girls, but Ninigi does not want the unattractive older sister and takes only the younger sister as his wife (This wife, Konohana no Sakuyahime, becomes regarded as the divinity of Mt. Fuji). Ninigi's action angers the girls' father, and he curses Ninigi saying that he and his descendants shall henceforth be short-lived.

O no Yasumaro: (died 723) O no Yasumaro was a scholar-official of the Yamato court and compiler of *Kojiki*. Emperor Temmu ordered him to compile an authoritative history, starting with the Age of the Gods, in order to eradicate the record of the many errors, omissions, and falsehoods that the emperor believed marred the existing documents. These early records are now lost. He worked with the court attendant Hieda no Are, who recited from memory much of the material that went into *Kojiki*. In other words, O no Yasumaro acted as scribe and Hieda no Are as reciter (see *kataribe*); *Kojiki*, completed in 712, was the collaborative effort of these two people. Emperor Temmu never saw the finished product; O no Yasumaro finished *Kojiki* during Empress Gemmei's reign (707-715). A decade later, he was also involved in the compilation of *Nihon shoki* (720), another history of Japan commissioned by the throne.

Shinto: Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion. The two Chinese characters used to write the word Shinto are ? (*shin* or *kami*), which means gods or divinity, and ? (*dō/tō* or *michi*), which means way or road. Therefore, Shinto is often translated as "the way of the gods." The use of this term dates to around the 6th century A.D. and was clearly deemed necessary at this time to differentiate this set of beliefs and practices from Buddhism, which was being introduced into Japan around this time.

A leading scholar of the history of religions in Japan sums up Shinto in this way:

“The beginnings of Shinto are clouded in the mists of the prehistory of Japan, and it eludes such simple characterizations as polytheism, emperor cult, fertility cult, or nature worship, although these features are embodied in it. Having no founder, no official sacred scriptures, and no fixed system of ethics or doctrines, Shinto has been influenced historically by Chinese civilization, especially Confucianism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, it has preserved its abiding, if nebulous, ethos through the ages. Thus, in a real sense, Shinto may be regarded as the ensemble of contradictory and yet peculiarly Japanese types of religious beliefs, sentiments, and approaches, which have been shaped and conditioned by the historical experience of the Japanese people from the prehistoric period to the present.” (Kitagawa, Joseph M. *On Understanding Japanese Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 139)

Kojiki is considered the most sacred Shinto text; however, Shinto notions and practices pre-existed this text. The earliest traces of what likely became Shinto date back to prehistoric times; the burial practices, agricultural rites, sacrificial rites, and other practices of the Jōmon (ca. 10,000 B.C.-ca 300 B.C.) and Yayoi (ca 300 B.C. - ca. 300 A.D.) periods are the origins of many Shinto practices and beliefs.

The Kofun period (ca. 300-710) was a time of immense development and the emergence of Japan as a nation. The clan (**uji**) system characteristic of this period cannot be thought of without reference to Shinto. Each clan worshipped its own tutelary deity (ujigami=clan + god) and sub-deities, the headman of each clan was not only its political but also religious leader. Shinto mythology and cosmology reflect the complex networks and allegiances of these clans and their deities and beliefs. Much of the religious activity of the early clans was concerned with rites of agriculture, the seasons, fertility, etc., and traces of these can still be found in Shinto rituals and symbols today. However, deity worship also came to be the focal point of each clan’s political existence. Clan headmen were simultaneously political leaders and, as the clan’s head priest (uji no kami, here “kami” means superior rather than deity), religious leaders who had special access to each clan’s deity. Politics and Shinto have been intimately and complexly linked in Japan, as the myths in *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* already suggest, since the dawn of time. And it has continued to be a controversial issue down to the present time.

Shinto became, in effect, the organization of these many clan deities into one system that posits, **Amaterasu**, the Sun Goddess and tutelary deity of the **Yamato** clan, at its apex. The pantheon of deities reflects the political structure of Japan as it was established prior to the compilation of the myths, which fixed this structure and the legitimacy of the imperial lineage. In addition, Shinto deities dwell on earth and among us. Rocks, mountains, streams, trees, in all of these deities may reside. One could say that attention to nature, more than ethics or morality, is a central force of Shinto.

Confucianism, Taoism (especially yin-yang divination), and Buddhism all influenced Shinto over the centuries. At times, in fact the lines between Shinto and Buddhism have become

blurred or have been blurred intentionally. In the 8th century, for example, during the construction of a huge statue of the Buddha in the capital of **Nara** at the Tōdaiji temple, a messenger was sent to **Ise Shrine** to establish Amaterasu's reaction to this event. It is said that the goddess revealed at this time that she and the Cosmic Buddha were two sides of the same entity. Combination shrine-temple (Shinto-Buddhist) complexes spread up around Japan, and many of the deities of the Shinto pantheon came to be seen as Buddhist bodhisattvas.

Susanowo: Susanowo, **Amaterasu's** brother, figures prominently in Book One of *Kojiki*. According to the myths in *Kojiki*, Susanowo and Amaterasu were both born when **Izanagi** bathed in a river to rid himself of the pollution of Yomi, land of darkness and the dead, after chasing after and then away from his sister/wife, **Izanami**. Susanowo was born from Izanagi's nose and is a complex deity originally sent by his father to rule the Sea Plain. He is also associated with storms, winds, and water.

In the myths, Susanowo does not take up his duties as god of the seas but rather weeps uncontrollably causing the trees to wither and the seas to dry up. When Izanagi asks his son why he weeps so, Susanowo says that he wishes to go visit his mother, Izanami, in the land of Yomi. This enrages Izanagi who expels his son. Before leaving the realm of the deities, however, Susanowo goes to say farewell to his sister, Amaterasu. Amaterasu, suspicious of her brother's intentions, prepares for a confrontation. The siblings engage in an odd competition to prove the sincerity of their intentions, and Susanowo claims victory. However, Susanowo proceeds to wreak havoc in Amaterasu's domain; for example, he throws excrement in the sacred hall that Amaterasu uses to taste the new rice of the fields. Amaterasu tries to be conciliatory, but her brother continues his cruel acts, until out of fear she flees his terrors by hiding herself in a cave and throwing the world into darkness. After Amaterasu finally reemerges and restores light and order to the world, she and the other deities impose punishments on Susanowo and then expel him.

After being expelled from Amaterasu's realm, Susanowo descends to earth and settles in Izumo in western Japan (MAP). The stories of his feats there take up a good portion of Book One in *Kojiki*. The Izumo clan (**uji**) was a powerful clan that resisted and then finally submitted to the central rule of the **Yamato** clan and its imperial lineage. Susanowo becomes the hero and ancestral deity of this clan. He slays dragons, rescues maidens, and gradually becomes a much more likable character. According to the myths, he presents his sword to Amaterasu as a sign of his submission and the submission of the Izumo clan to Yamato rule. This sword becomes one of the **imperial regalia** and is the same sword Yamatohime, the Ise Priestess (see **Ise Shrine**), gives to her nephew **Yamato Takeru** before he sets out to subdue the eastern clans. Susanowo is also credited with composing the first Japanese poem, a simple poem composed in praise of his new palace at Izumo:

Eight clouds arise.

The eight-fold fence of Izumo

To dwell with my wife

I make an eight-fold fence;

Oh, that eight-fold fence.

Temmu, Emperor: (died 686, reigned 672-686) Emperor Temmu was the 40th emperor of Japan according to the traditional count that includes several legendary and semi-historical sovereigns as well. His father was Emperor Jōmei, the 34th sovereign, and his mother also reigned as Empress Saimei. His consort (who would herself later reign as Empress Jitō) was the daughter of his elder brother, Emperor Tenji, who preceded him on the throne. While Temmu was still a prince and his brother Tenji reigned, great reforms (The Taika Reforms, 645) took place. These reforms, based largely on Chinese governing and bureaucratic models, helped codify the rule of the imperial line and the administration of the growing court around it. Always in his brother's shadow, Temmu grew resentful when Tenji named his son as imperial successor. Finally, in what is called the Jinshin Disturbance, Temmu rebelled. Temmu was victorious in this succession dispute and established his court at Asuka in the province of Yamato where he ruled for 15 years.

Temmu continued the reform-minded activities of his brother, Tenji. These reforms led to the weakening of the clans (*uji*) and the strengthening of the central government. He is famous for being a skillful administrator who pursued and encouraged the legal and civil reforms that had been established, along the lines of Chinese models, to promote the smooth running of a strong centralized government. In 681, Emperor Temmu initiated the project of compiling a national history, as China had a long history of doing, because he believed there were many errors in the existing record. He wanted to inscribe once and for all the story of the victorious Yamato lineage. He envisioned a compilation that would correct the existing errors and shortcomings and establish the "correct" history of Japan before it was too late. As a result, he commanded Hieda no Are and O no Yasumaro to embark on the task of setting the record straight. *Kojiki* was the end result of this imperial command, though it was not completed until after Emperor Temmu's death. He is also responsible for starting the project that became *Nihon shoki*.

Uji: Clans or lineage groups in early Japan. Each clan was formed around common ancestral or tutelary deities (see **Shinto**). These *uji* competed for land and power during the prehistoric and **Yamato** periods, until finally the Yamato *uji* gained a stronghold and led a coalition. During the late 6th and 7th centuries, this coalition gradually gave way to a centralized government around the Yamato imperial line. This government adapted Chinese-style political institutions, laws, and ethical codes, and much of the old *uji* system was lost. However, many of the *uji* were transformed into hereditary lineages that for centuries carried on their specialization. Lineage,

genealogy, ancestry, and heredity have always been extremely central in Japanese society, politics, religion, and the arts; and this can be traced back to the ancient uji system.

Writing System: In *Kojiki* it states that Korean immigrants introduced Chinese script to the Japanese around 300 A.D. Other evidence points to an even earlier date. Regardless, Chinese characters were the first writing system known in Japan, where no native system existed. At first, these characters were probably only viewed as magical and strange signs; gradually, however, the Japanese realized the potential this system could offer them for recording and communicating information and experience. By the middle of the **Yamato period** (300-710 A.D.), the government employed scribes, many of whom were Korean immigrants or their descendants, to keep track of and record the business of government and administration. This is a period in Japanese history when Chinese culture, political institutions, religion, etc. were extremely influential in the formation of Japan's own institutions and practices.

The Japanese kept many of these records in Chinese (*kanbun*), and written Chinese was used in much the same way as Latin was used throughout Europe. However, when the Japanese wanted to write in Japanese, they had to find ways to adapt the Chinese characters (*kanji*). *Kojiki* is the oldest extant text that illustrates how the Japanese began adapting the system of Chinese characters to transcribe the Japanese language. One of the reasons it became necessary to transcribe Japanese (versus merely translating into written Chinese) was for the purpose of preserving the oral nature of many of the early songs and myths. In addition, the names (including proper pronunciation) and pronouncements of the deities were held to be sacred and magical intonations; these could not be captured in a foreign tongue. Also, native proper nouns such as place names could not be written in Chinese.

Chinese characters have both phonetic and semantic values. Like the number "1", Chinese characters contain meaning first and foremost, and sound (one, or uno, or ichi, etc.) is secondary. It is not even necessary to pronounce "1" in order to understand "1." On the other hand, we must pronounce the word "one" before we can get the meaning "1".

Today, Chinese characters and the Japanese language seem inevitably matched, but in actuality, the two systems are not very compatible. The Chinese language is monosyllabic and tonal and uses a word order similar to English (i.e., Subject, Verb, Object). Japanese, on the other hand, is polysyllabic, agglutinative, and atonal. Also, its grammatical structure is very different from Chinese (Subject, Object, Verb). Despite these differences, however, a system for writing Japanese using Chinese characters did develop. The Japanese created a cumbersome system that used the Chinese characters in two ways: 1) for their semantic value (meaning) and 2) for their phonetic value (sound). This system, used to write parts of *Kojiki* and other 8th century texts, was later abandoned for a simpler and more standardized form using syllabaries. Here, is a simplified explanation of the method used in *Kojiki*.

When translating portions of narrative, Chinese characters could be used for their semantic value. For example, the Chinese character meaning "tree" would be used, and when reading the Japanese would supply the native pronunciation. (This is the same as how modern speakers of English, French, and Spanish would each say the word for "1" differently, though its meaning is the same across all three spoken languages). This is the first and most straightforward means of using the Chinese characters. The second was necessary to transcribe native words, especially proper nouns. For example, to transcribe the native name **Amaterasu, O no Yasumaro** would have selected 5 Chinese characters that had pronunciations close to A-MA-TE-RA-SU. The problem was that there were many characters with, for example, the possible pronunciation "TE," and any of them could be used to represent the sound "TE" in Japanese. The characters, when transcribing these native words, were used primarily for sound, and often stripped of their meaning. But in a line of text characters being used for their sound and their meaning would be lined up next to each other. The reader would have to determine whether to read a character for its sound or meaning or perhaps even both. For example the character 天 means "heaven" and could be used just like that to mean heaven. This character is pronounced "ten." It could be used either to mean "heaven" or simply to represent the sound "ten" or "te" in a word that has no relation to "heaven" or "heavenly". And then again, it could be used in a way that combined its sound and meaning. For example, if this character were used in the transcription of the "te" in the name *Amaterasu*; then perhaps the divine nature of Amaterasu is hinted, even though "heaven" may not literally be a part of the native name Amaterasu.

It is a complex system that was simplified greatly in the centuries following the compilation of *Kojiki*. First, the Japanese eventually created two phonetic syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana* that could be used to transcribe native words and inflections as well as imported words from foreign languages. These syllabaries are cursive scripts made up of simplified versions of certain Chinese characters. But the simplification process was not completed in the classical age, modifications and standardization of the written language were made well into the 20th century!

*Note: Much of the information in this entry is adapted from the following article, which provides an excellent overview of the development of Japan's writing system:

Horton, H. Mack. "Japanese Spirit and Chinese Learning: Scribes and Storytellers in Pre-modern Japan." *The Ethnography of Reading*. Ed. Jonathan Boyarin.

Yamato Court & Yamato Period: The Yamato period (ca. 300-710 A.D.) saw the consolidation of imperial rule by the Yamato court, the introduction of Buddhism, and the increasing adaptation of Chinese political and bureaucratic institutions.

The Japanese imperial line originates in one of the important early clans (**uji**) that date back to around 300 A.D. This clan, the Yamato clan, also known as the Yamato Sun Line, competed with other clans for land and power. Gradually, the Yamato clan secured for itself the supreme position among the clans in what was initially a loose cooperative coalition among many clans.

Each of these clans had their own tutelary deities (see **Shinto**), religious beliefs, interests, and specializations. Within this coalition individual clans became responsible for different duties such as those of diviners, soldiers, etc. As the coalition of the clans become more secure, the Yamato exerted their centrality and right to rule. They re-enforced their position by claiming descent from **Amaterasu**, the Sun Goddess. As a result, this led to the creation of a complex cosmology that incorporated the deities of all the major clans and that reflected the social and political hierarchy that was developing with the Yamato clan front and center. This cosmology as well as the myths, beliefs, and rites of Shinto can be found in *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720). Both of these works, though completed in the following **Nara period** (710-794), clearly were compiled to legitimize and glorify the rule of the Yamato court as it strove to transform the coalition of clans into a sophisticated and centralized government.

The name Yamato comes from the central region of the main Japanese island, (MAP) where this clan finally established itself and its first courts. It is around the area of modern Nara.

Yamato Takeru: Legendary and archetypal hero of ancient Japan. According to the myths, he is the son of the legendary 12th emperor, Keikô. Yamato Takeru is famous for his subjugation of the aboriginal people found in western and eastern Japan and for extending the territory under the control of the **Yamato Court**. The story of Yamato Takeru likely developed between the 5th and 7th centuries and was then included in both *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. The accounts in these two works, however, differ greatly. *Kojiki* focuses more closely on the heroic deeds, adventures, and romantic side of this cultural hero and presents a far more literary representation. On the other hand, *Nihon shoki* uses this story to emphasize the legitimacy and centrality of the Yamato Court and the Imperial line and thus focuses more closely on the political consequences and significance of his deeds. (see additional information in Plot Summary, Interview Questions, Family Tree, etc.)

This material was prepared by the [Hero's Journey Internet Project Team](#), through [ORIAS](#).